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Whither Thou Goest



**WHITHER
THOU
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ATLANTA S. SOLLOWS

**THOMAS ALLEN LIMITED
TORONTO**

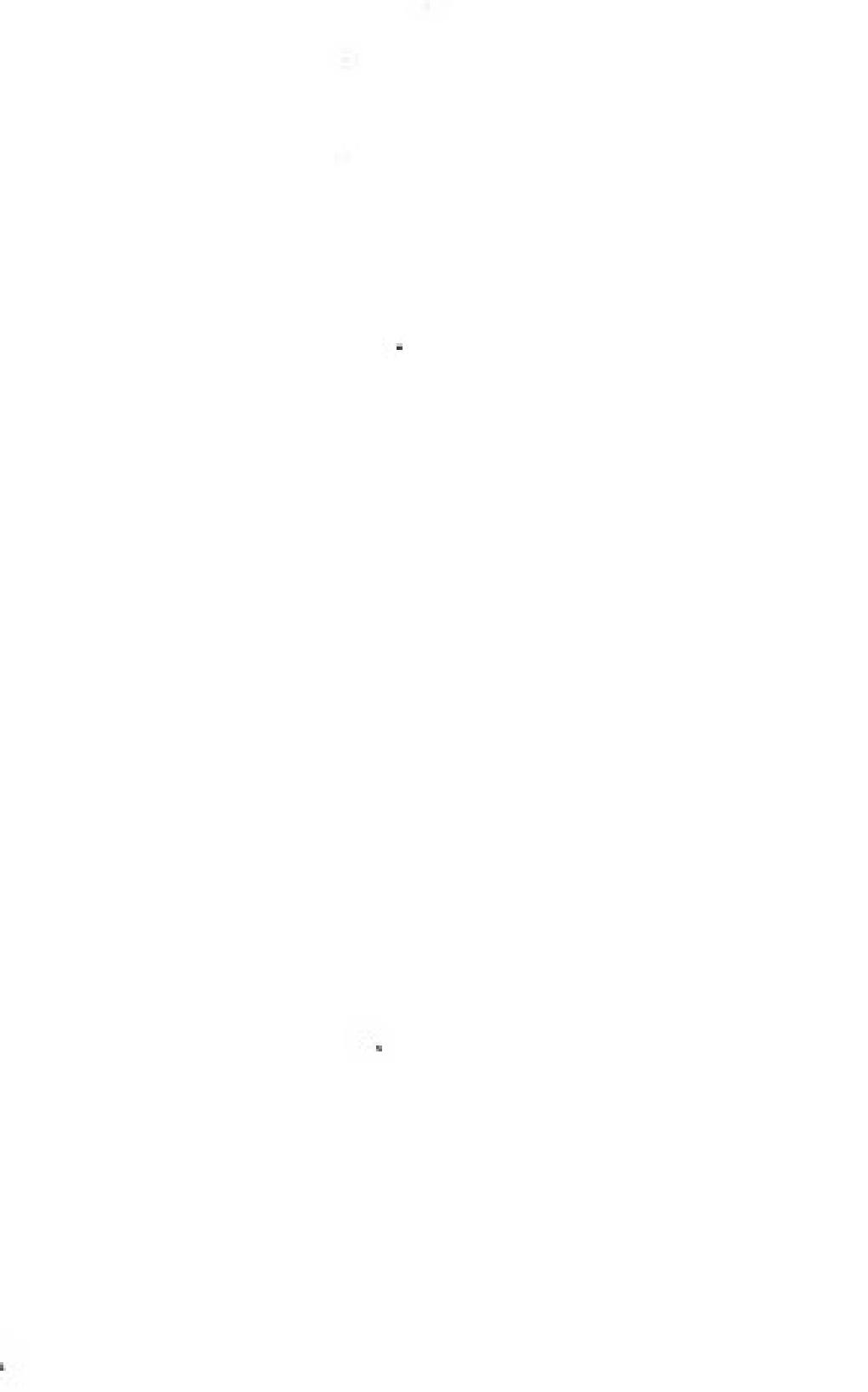
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Whither Thou Goest



CHAPTER

I

As the lengthening shadows of the fading sunset drew their shifting streaks across the prairie sky, the silence was broken only by the distant sound of plodding,—the shuffling of tired human feet. They paused awhile, then came nearer, down the deeply rutted trail.

To the ever sensitive ear of the range rider, Basil Underwood, these sounds were not unfamiliar. Often during the day or night, a neighbouring rancher had ridden many a mile to this house to borrow a few necessities, horse liniment, a bandage, or a smoke or two. There was always a welcome for the passer-by, as he pulled up to talk for an hour about the fall round-up or the crops when there were crops. There was nothing novel in having friend or stranger share the evening meal; therefore, Underwood was more intent upon the patch-

ing of a battered saddle than the approach of a wanderer.

The flickering stream of light from the open kitchen door caught the gaze of the worn and be-whiskered traveller, and, almost as a sleepwalker, his moccasined feet picked their way to the entrance where he sagged wearily against the crudely constructed gate until it creaked and fairly doubled with his weight.

Underwood arose quickly from his perch-like seat on the narrow plank veranda, and, with the proverbial hospitality of the ranger, called out, "Hello, Stranger! Come on in."

The old man slowly raised a hand to the grimy leather straps that held a bulging and apparently too heavy knapsack, which had slipped from his shoulder. With a few strides, the ranger reached the gate where he hastily removed the dust covered pack, then stooping, placed one arm about the body of the man, and all but carried him across the yard, up the two plank steps of his home, into the warm kitchen.

As Betty Underwood heard the voices behind her, she turned from her task over the hot stove where the sizzling fat was sending its appetizing odor into the night air, to see her husband carefully seating a bewildered and unmistakably sick man, in her home-made rocker by the window.

The wheat-cakes were covered and placed where they would keep warm. A few sticks were added to the fire and the kettle refilled. While the young wife was making ready to lend a hand, she could hear her husband's kindly voice reassuring the stranger and telling him to "take it easy."

Prairie mud encrusted the old man's stocking-

less feet. The broken blisters were tinged with blood where the wheat stubble had torn into the flesh. Reaching for an improvised foot-stool —a salt box padded, covered and frilled, the ranger raised the tender feet and placed them upon it.

The good samaritans forgot about their nearly prepared meal, also the fact that their three children had not returned from their usual Saturday's trip to Grandad's, six miles east on the trail. Rather, the anxious couple hustled about for their best, deep, tin pail, into which they poured the now heated water. Then they lowered the traveller's sore feet one at a time into the soothing bath, with a touch that was akin to professional.

"What's your name, stranger?" asked Underwood.

"Mah name's Judd — Thomas Judd," drawled the old man. "Just plain Tom, to mah friends."

"Fine!" exclaimed the ranger, and placing his hand on the bent shoulders, asked "Where you from?—if you don't mind me asking."

The man was silent for a moment and then said, slowly, "Ah come a long way, son, but ah needed a good doctor!"

"You need a doctor alright," replied Basil Underwood. He took a faded plaid shirt from its accustomed nail on the back of the kitchen door, rolled it into pillow shape and placed it beneath the sick man's head.

"Come now, lean your head against this and rest!" he said, and he gave the roll another gentle poke.

There was tenderness in the strong, serious face that looked down upon the weary guest, slowly drifting into a much needed sleep.

"Better have some tea before you take a nap!" advised Underwood, reaching for the steaming cup his wife had prepared. He held it to the lips of the man, as though he were feeding a child, letting him take it sip by sip.

"Come a long way, Mister?" inquired Underwood, knowing the question would keep the man from falling asleep before finishing the badly needed hot drink.

"Yes, young fella," came the lagging answer. "Back there, west of the Caribou district." His eyes closed for a second, then he continued, "North of Frazier Valley. Mah cabin's in the mountains," and the rheumatic thumb with its twisted joint gave a backward sign in the direction he had come. Then turning his faded eyes towards the table where Betty was seated, he said, "That's good tea, ma'am! Ain't had nothin' like that fur a week near on now."

"I'm glad you like it." Betty took the empty cup from her husband's hand and proceeded to assist him in guiding the old man to a bunk-like bed against the wall.

While the bloodshot eyes and dusty hands were being bathed, the incoherent mumbling continued.

"Yes, mah cabin's in the mountains. Big trees—shade fer cattle. Game, too, when ah'm able to trap it. Ah said Frazier Valley. Mah place is—Paradise Valley—lease—it was . . ."

Bending over the bunk, Underwood tucked the blanket well under the edges of the freshly straw-packed mattress, and said, "Have a good sleep, Mister! That's your medicine,—sleep!"

As the heavy lids closed, Underwood continued to stand, straight and tall, beside the bunk, listening

intently to the almost inaudible words falling from the old man's slightly twisted lips.

"God b-less you bless you b-oth, fer been' so good to an old co-o-dger like me."

The slow tick, tick of the dinted Big Ben, and the heavy breathing of the sleeping man, were the only sounds that came to distract the deepening wonder in the heart of the prairie wife and mother, who sat by the table, her head resting upon her upturned hands.

"Poor old fellah!" drawled Basil Underwood, as he stepped towards the door, hatless, into the night.

Sauntering towards the small corral, Underwood's thudding heels roused the spinted horse that was standing with head raised as though watching the beam of light which suddenly came and went from different curves on the trail as it wound through the low hills. Called by a sharp, fluty whistle, which he had learned to look for and love since first standing on his four wobbly legs, the horse pranced to the high pole fence and thrust his head far out, tossing his glory mane from side to side, as he replied in his own characteristic horse language with a shrill, pleased whinny.

"Good old Buckshot!" exclaimed his master, patting the wet nose that rubbed against his arm. "We'll go riding some of these days, old fellah!" Reaching across the barn, he stroked the silky mane. "Wonder how you would like those mountains? Think you'd stick to steep trails after six years of this flat riding?"

Underwood continued to lean on the high corral fence as his horse pranced and tossed his head, neighing his high patched reply, which might have

mean, "I could stick to the trail, old man, but could you stick to the saddle?"

Both man and animal were quite accustomed to the flat, desolate country they now called home. It would indeed be difficult for either of them to shift unto a land of forests, shade for cattle, and steep mountain slopes as Tim had described in his ramblings.

Back in the dimly lit kitchen of the prairie home sat Betty, her cheek still resting heavily upon her folded hands. At times she toyed with the half-filled cup of tea which had long turned cold, her thoughtful eyes seemingly fixed upon the board wall in front of her. Then again, her gaze would turn to the bunk and the dejected figure resting there. A look of compassion was on her face. The man's heavy breathing was proof of sound sleep and she was glad for the meagre comfort their home could provide. Her thoughts raced back to that recent moment when her husband had stood by the bunk looking down at the worn and sickly visitor. She recalled the look in her husband's heavily lidded eyes, the characteristic twitching of his jaw muscles. Through the years, she had learned to understand that look as she had seen it often,—too often, she thought for a moment, for her own happiness. Tonight there was no doubt of its significance.

Apprehension was written in every feature of the young, though motherly face, as it again shifted its gaze to the high-cut kitchen window that looked out over the Eastern plains.

Rising, she crossed silently to the window where she rested her folded arms on the high sill and continued to peer towards a narrow path in the hills.

where the trail unwound like a thread, and was lost in the semi-darkness.

In this mixed reverie there was not a trace of disloyalty to the man she had promised to love and cherish. Restless, though he was, his erratic nature was overshadowed by his great kindness. His silence was the result of long days and longer nights in the saddle, riding the plains with no sound but the lowing of the cattle, the hoof clatter of his own steed, or the lone call of the coyote as it slid down the coulee or steep ravine for water. At least these were the loving conclusions of the wife, who had tried to understand and cater to those silent moods as few wives would do. She felt that she had been well repaid in her husband's unbounded kindness and rectitude.

And yet, how things and places flashed back in her memory at this moment, to almost stifle her sanest thinking! Her husband's face haunted her — those partly closed eyes that looked but did not see! That expression, the appearance of which always indicated his irrepressible impulse again to hit the highway! It was a look almost of desparation, as though it might mean sudden and inconvenient changes, disappointment and long weeks of waiting for her, alone.

True, there had been times when Underwood, feeling a bit remorseful, had tried earnestly to explain away that restless urge to be up and moving, anywhere, any place, so long as that urge was not repressed. Back in school days there had been times when books were like bricks and concentration was impossible. Often he had turned his pony from the school trail and had ridden to a neighbouring ranch where he had stooked wheat for a day

or two, donned a battered sombrero and taken a hand at taming a wild mustang.

"Don't worry, Mother," his dad had said repeatedly, and consolingly, when anxious eyes had watched the night fall with no signs of the trotting pony on the trail. "Like father like son," you know! Knowing me as you do, we can't blame him too much. He'll turn up alright." And, as the older father had mused on his own roving life, he'd consoled the mother of Basil with the fact that their son always returned unscathed and happier if not wiser from his exploits. Together, they had learned the hopelessness of interfering when that restless spirit broke loose. Together they had reasoned, and kept their faith.

As time went on and range-riding appealed more and more to his adventurous spirit, because it provided an opportunity to cover tracless plains, the urge became an obsession. Basil Underwood had begun to feel deep within himself that as his father had explained his own restlessness - the salt of the seven seas in the blood of his ancestors really had something to do with his desire to roam, though this alone comprised his knowledge of prenatal influence. He recalled, however, from the available genealogy his dad had given him, the fact that his ancestors on both sides of the family, were pre-Loyalists, and were people who, in their longings for far pastures, had weathered the perils of the seas in sailing ships and crossed from the old world to the new. He recalled how thrilled he had been as a lad to learn that the very first ship after the Mayflower, had brought his forefathers to the soil upon which he had played when a small boy in Beverly, Massachusetts, — and that these brave

men had later built their own wooden vessels and proceeded to the East coast of Nova Scotia where they had built again, the first ships of their kind, in that Province.

Now, Basil Underwood was a man, and had been married twelve years. During that time, he had moved over the Northwestern country seven times. First it had been the mountain areas in one of which he and Betty Kinnear had met, and loved and married. Then, they had gone to the sea which he formerly had tried vainly to forget.

Always changing, always restless for that something that might be just around the corner. After a stay in one place, Underwood would exclaim, "Oh, I know it puts us back each time we move, and each move gets harder as the family increases, but it seems I can't do much about it. I feel I must go to a new place, new scenes, every so often, else there's nothing to live for!"

"What about me?" had been the wife's hurt inquiry. "Not that I'm complaining. I knew what you were like before I married you. But something ought to make you settle down, especially now, that we have the children."

"Goodness knows I don't want to hurt you, Betty," Underwood had replied. "No man has a better wife than you are. I want changes alright, but never without you. You know that!"

And thus it had been. Moving on, and on. Deriving pleasure in getting a new start; in knowing that no one had ploughed that stretch before. Nobody had made a fence like this before, from river driftwood. "Things had never grown here before I came. It is all new! It is mine! No one has been here to mess it up!"

In a letter to a relative back East, Underwood had written—"I gradually get things about us to make life easier and I say, 'This is fine. I shall like it here!' When suddenly, out of a clear sky, everything goes flat. From then on I might stuck for a year, but that year is an eternity. No work is too hard, no sacrifice too great to put me in a position where I can pick up again and seek new country. The minute I finally decide to go, I feel that a ten ton weight has lifted from my chest. I can breathe again. I am free!"

The letter continued: "I don't suppose I should have married but I did, and Betty seems to like me, regardless. She says it's worth the battle of mowing just to see me smile again, or whistle, which she tells me is sure sign of spring again. How Betty has stood by me all these years, I cannot fully analyse my feelings. It's all a mystery. I've promised each move would be my last, thinking each to be the spot I was looking for. I don't agree with the fellah who said, 'When you come to the right spot you know it.' I've almost believed it at times. I liked the feel of the grass under my feet. I liked the lay of the land and the big fleecy clouds that hung so close to the earth, the sun wasn't too hot, or the nights too cool. Everything seemed to tell me it was the right place. Then — well, I'm just made that way!"

Again that night, standing with one hand stroking the mane of his neighing horse, his eyes riveted upon the endless trail of the Milky Way, Underwood felt that unpredictable urge, stronger than ever before. He realized that his wife had sensed his unrest for days. He knew, too, she had watched his face as the stranger had told him about

his cabin in the mountains,—its surrounding streams, and the game so abundant when he was well enough to trap it.

"I might as well try to make the sun stand still, as to erase that picture from my mind," thought Underwood.

Then he securely fastened the corral gate and walked slowly back to his home.

By now all remnant of the evening meal had been cleared away, and Betty was slipping into a warm jacket that she might join her husband as he waited outside for the approach of a truck or car, which he hoped would bring their children from the day's visit with their grandparents.

The stress and strain, the hardships of prairie life, the incredible inconveniences and travail of motherhood, had not lessened the unusual devotion of husband and wife, but rather had bound more closely together, this man and woman of the plains. Together they stood watching the sharp beam of light that now shot its rays from side to side,—into the sky as the low-hills were reached, then vanishing as the vehicle made its sudden turns, coming nearer.

Soon they could hear the distant rumble of a rancher's truck, then the grinding brakes brought it to a halt by the gate.

Gone were the fears that had assailed them. Only too well they knew the dangers of that desolate country after night-fall. Often the family had been awakened by the bark and howl of the prairie wolf or coyote pack, had scrambled from their beds to look down into gleaming eyes as hungry animals romped and jumped on all fours towards the window.

The Underwoods had taught their children to notice the difference in the coyote calls,—the long, mournful howl of the male that resembled the cry of a lost dog, the sharp, short and shrill yaps of the female, sometimes ending in a high fading note. The children had soon learned that the female call was the more terrifying of the two,—the one with the chill-giving sounds that often disturbed their sleep in the dead of night, or sent them scampering home from play or the picking of berries in the hills. The female call, too, was more confusing than the male, giving the impression of a full pack, when in fact all the blood-curdling yells might come from one lone coyote. Of course there were times when call answered call, the echoes again giving the impression that the listener was surrounded by several packs, where there might be but three or four individual animals scattered through the hills, calling to one another.

On several occasions, the mother had given her children a practical illustration of her skill in dealing with a prowling coyote,—one that had pursued the baby chicks, after licking clean the food pan outside the door of their pen. She had rushed for the small rifle, which was kept high on two steer-horns in the kitchen, raised it to the level of her steady eyes and shot the growling animal straight through the heart. One had but to glance about the humble prairie home — rough though serviceable, its poor floors scrubbed thin — to recognise this woman's capable touch, the use she made of each pelt she secured, pelts of various kinds and colours, from the muskrat, cougar, timber wolf, to the red, black and silver cross-fox, and one large black bear. Some were made into

coverings for the family beds in winter, others were used as rugs for the floors of bedrooms and sitting-room. There were coats with fur collars,—all the handiwork of the young mother, who had learned to improvise to perfection.

Tonight, while she stood beside her husband, waiting for the children, with one arm resting on his shoulder, there was an expression on her face that stole a part of her youthfulness,—a far away look in her eyes, as though they too, were searching for something in another world.

It was not until excited voices called, "Hello, Mum"—hello, Pop'" that the mother's face softened and a smile broke through. Then, hand in hand, the happy couple walked to the gate to meet their children.

The harvest moon came up like a huge ball of fire and flooded the horizon. The usual chill that accompanies the prairie sunset was left, and little blood Jean was muffled to the ears in one of Gran's sweaters, the arms of which flapped like those of a scare-crow in the cornfield. Down from the track she climbed, followed by her older brother Raymond, his hand in hers, while with the other, she grasped the top of a heavy paper bag and a roll of newspapers. David was too sleepy to realize what was happening when his dad reached and lifted him from the arms of the rancher, who had kept the little fellow close in the fold of his own warm body during the six mile drive.

"Well, son, you had us worried!" exclaimed the father, as he relieved Raymond of another paper bag which he seemed to be clutching with special care.

"I know, Pop," Ray answered, "but we couldn't

help it. Mr. Lancer didn't come for us 'till after supper, and Grandad was wormed, too," and he added, excitedly; "Gran is sick again, so Jean had to help her with the dishes. Doctor's coming tomorrow."

This information was met with a whispered response and the assurance that someone would get over to Grandad's on the morrow, but now was the time to get warm, and go to bed. Meanwhile, little Jean's hand had caught that of her mother's, as the family entered the house quietly, with a low shu-u-ush from the parents to each child as they pointed to the sleeping figure on the bunk.

CHAPTER

II

Jean's round, chubby face was bursting with smiles, her blue eyes far from sleepy, as she delved into the sagging sweater pocket, bringing to light a much crumpled envelope — sticky with home-made molasses candy — which she passed to her dad.

"Grandad wants you to read this," she whispered loudly. "It's from our aunt, way down where you lived when you were a little boy, Gran says" — and the child threw out her chin in much the way she had seen her Grandmother do when speaking of the writer of the letter — "aunt Sarr can swear like a pirate!"

Then, in pestering mood little Jean said, "What's a pirate, Pop? What is it?"

Basil Underwood smiled, taking the extended letter and answering only with a raised finger to his lips as he walked to the table and sat down to read it.

In brushed tones, later, mother was given a full account of the day's activities as the two smaller children were being prepared for bed. There had been fun, galore, in getting acquainted with three new calves that had pranced about on their wobbly legs like kittens, and in hide-and-seek behind the wheat stalks with Jerry, the collie whose daddy was a wolf. There had been jobs to do for Gran 'cause she couldn't get around much since being paralysed. But the crowning pleasure of the day, had been the ride with Grandad to deliver a load of cabbages to the Russians in their settlement, ten miles away.

David had little to say except that he wanted to go to bed. To finish his prayers was a punishment, or so it seemed, as he would switch from, "Thy kingdom come," to, "Mum, couldn't I please have just one doughnut," — remembering there were a dozen or so in the bag Ray had brought home. Then, with the gentle urging of his mother's voice, he would begin again, "Give us our daily bread," breaking off in a sleepy voice with, "Mum, I don't like bread much, I just want one doughnut." Finally he was tumbled into his bed and was soon fast asleep.

His mother was feeling the strain of a hard day of washing, ironing, cooking and mending and wished to get to her own bed without more chatter from little Jean, who persisted in completing the story of the day.

Betty bent and kissed the warm, soft cheeks of her children passing from one cot to the other, as she tucked the quilts comfortably about them, with a, "Go to sleep now. You can tell me the rest of it tomorrow."

Stepping quietly to the door of her and Basil's bed-room, Betty was startled by the voice of Jean calling, "Oh, Mum! Mum! I forgot to tell you about the flaps, I saw them today!"

"Can't that wait until tomorrow, dear?" she asked, turning again to the children's room.

"No, Mum. Listen!" and Jean lowered her voice to what she considered a whisper.

"I saw the Russian women gathering them in baskets. They had big piles of them!"

For a moment Betty recalled her own first impressions of some of the characteristics and habits of those plains people. She had read of Tolstoy and his influence over the lives of the non-conformist peasants who had chosen to reject all ritual, for the good of their souls as they believed. How unfortunate it was, she had thought, that the man Tolstoy had not, in his teachings, taken more into account the sanitation of their homes, and lives. Food, and the cooking of it was of little consequence to many of these dour women. In summer a cartload of cucumbers or cabbages meant to them what a normally filled larder meant to the Canadian settler. But before Betty could collect her thoughts completely, Jean had continued her story.

Half sitting, huddled in her quilt with her round chin cupped in her small hands, she was saying, "Grandad says those big, round things the cattle drop all over the pasture are flaps!—You know what I mean, Mum?" and the child measured the sitter with her two small arms encircled.

Yes, the mother knew exactly what her little daughter meant. Often had she seen these women gathering the dried manure from the plains, and

had upon one occasion, seen it used in their stoves while preparing their food, and had been told how even its heat was. She had then endeavoured to explain to them that there was plenty of driftwood they could use, not more than a few miles from their homes. But they were apparently satisfied with the primitive and easiest way of life, showing how little they had profited by any lessons in sanitation. The dried manure had been piled in high bens behind their stoves in their kitchens, and to them, it meant only the means of satisfying their physical needs, such as warmth and hunger.

"It gives heat, doesn't it?" had asked one woman, with the strength of two ordinary men.

"Heat, yes!" Betty had answered, "but what about the smell? Don't you mind that along with your food?" thinking, "surely there must be some disagreeableness about it."

"Hell, no!" was the Russian woman's reply. "My man, he smell worse'n that!"

As Betty had mounted her horse and ridden away that day, she had not only visioned her own neat kitchen, but had reflected on those days in history when Indians, trappers, traders and other prairie nomads had roamed these plains along with timber wolves so close to her own door,—and how these men had discovered the heat value of "black stones" which they preferred to the buffalo chips over which they boiled their black coffee, fried their sour-dough or prairie chicken. Consequently, there was no doubt in her mind as to what Grandad had meant when he had been asked to explain the practice of fuel gathering, and had used the expression, "flaps."

Again tucking the bedclothes about her daughter, the mother kissed her and passed to her own room to undress for the night.

In the kitchen downstairs, young Raymond's attention had been drawn to the bunk from which strange and weird noises were emerging, first, a deep-toned gurgle, preceded by a snort, sometimes a cough, then easing off into a slow, sizzling sound.

The twisted mouth of the sleeper had fallen open, and an artificial plate, which had suffered the loss of several bicuspids, was resting on the blistered lower lip, ready to be blown from the mouth with the next deep puff.

The boy was accustomed to all types of traveller who had sought shelter in his home from time to time, and therefore he was not over curious as to the man who was sleeping while he and his dad had talked of the boy's doings. But the sight of the artificial plate did arouse curiosity.

"What's that, Pop?" inquired the boy, pointing to the store teeth. The father arose from his chair by the table, and crossed to the bunk where he bent over the sleeping man, and adjusted the pillows to make him more comfortable.

"What's his name, Pop?" came the whispered inquiry.

"Just call him Mr. Tim," replied the father. "He's an old man and sick. We must be kind to him, son. But it's past your bed time,—better turn in."

Soon the little house was still. The children were asleep, and the light tap, tap of Betty's bedroom slippers told that she, too, was retiring. Underwood was alone except for the sleeping stranger. Opening the roll of papers, he sat down

by the dimmed light again, to scan for a few minutes the beloved "Family Herald," the publication that had meant as much as his irreconcilable existence.

But the pages merely flapped through his nervous fingers. He was not in the mood for reading, after all. Neither could he honestly fight the battle raging in his conscience.

"Why do I have to be like this?" he questioned himself. "Why am I always looking for something I never find? If only I could settle down like any normal human being, and stay put!" Then all the hardships and inconveniences of the last few years loomed high, and he thought for the thousandth time, "It's for Betty's sake this time. I might have been selfish and thought of my own damn restlessness on other moves, but I'm really thinking of her and the children now! And I'm beginning to wonder, sometimes, if she's really happy."

Then the thought struck him forcibly. "Why should she be happy? Have I given her anything but the kids, and a lot of worry?"

Underwood had seen a strange expression flash over his wife's face several times of late, especially when they had spoken of the winter, the cold, and the children getting to school.

There had been many unforgettable experiences during previous winters when the storms had kept the children at the school house, - cramped though it was, - not only over night, but most of the week. Of course, the teacher was with them, and there was no question of sufficient food or warmth, yet it was indeed nerve-wracking to parents not to be certain all was well.

"Surely Betty has had enough of this!" Under-

wood thought. Even in spring, and in fall before the bitterly cold weather set in, the children, going and coming from school, were in danger of coyote attack. Nine miles was a long way to travel to school on horse back though that was often their only way of conveyance. Young Ray would be perched in the saddle, straight and well balanced, his protecting arms about his sister who held close to the strapped-on blanket, horse's mane, and food basket.

Underwood then wondered what his wife would say when he told her of his decision to try the far west again. But he well knew what she would reply. A smile broke for a moment about his lips, and a tender look came into his eyes.

"Whether thou goest, I will go!" Yet, that would be her answer as she had said before, laughingly at first, when he would rush in from the fields and say, "Come on, Bet, lets hit the trail!"

"What a woman for a man like me!" thought the man. All through their years together, the dutiful wife had uncomplainingly packed and moved in whatever direction had taken his fancy. It had not always been easy. Sometimes there had been a tiny garden which had required much faithful care, to abandon, or a cherished nook in a home that she had fashioned to her comfort. If it had happened to be late in the fall when the wanderlust struck him, the old waggon was backed from the barn, and together they had built a covering under which they had packed their few moveable belongings. Always helping, never grumbling when unfinished sewing had to be put on one side—a wollen garment made over into school pants, the

cutting down of winter underwear—Betty had adapted herself to him.

"I hate to do this to her again!" Underwood exclaimed to himself. His lips tightened and the two deep lines around his mouth deepened.

Removing his boots and placing them in their accustomed place by the wood box, he began to undress, throwing his chaps over the chairback and putting his shirt and neckerchief on the hanger behind the door. Stepping to the iron sink, he turned the tap and waited patiently for the spluttering dribble from the water casks outside.

"This is another reason," he thought, "why I'm sick of it." No more carting of water for nearly two miles from the river over desert and ant hills for him! What a trying experience it had been waiting for the muddy brown water to settle in the casks, drawing off, boiling it, then sinking it deep into a dry abandoned well to keep it fit for drinking.

But in all this confusion of thought, Underwood was conscious of gratitude that no great discomfort from this inconvenience had come to his family, as it had to many of the prairie folk who had neglected to boil the water they drank.

Dysentery and typhoid fever had played havoc in many homes, and villages where sanitary precautions were not adhered to, or unknown.

Underwood and his wife had tried to help, or scare if necessary, the careless settlers, when knowledge would not penetrate otherwise, into boiling and purifying the water they used in their homes, or into filtering it through sand. They had repeatedly emphasized the importance of screens on windows and doors in summer, and above all, the necessity

of the fly-proof privy. Though many of the people had ignored these kindly suggestions and had suffered the loss of members of their families, Underwood breathed a prayer of thankfulness that his loved ones had so far been spared.

Gazing through the small window above the sink, he could see white, fleecy clouds hanging close to the earth like huge bales of cotton and patches of blue peppered with millions of flickering stars,—a spectacle to revel in on any other night. But now Underwood's mind was full of other things,—swaying trees whose tops all but swept the sky,—cool streams,—a calm gluttening lake where small revolving circles told of jumping trout.

Then he thought again of the children. Had he given them a fair chance? Should they not be given the rights of every child to roams through fields and over the land of earth where flowers grew?—flowers and bush that did not harbour the ant-hill or rattler? Should they not have the simple joys of making dandelion chauncs and watching the robin as she built her nest? He had enjoyed those things as a boy, but what a tramp existence he had to far given his own sons! The face of little David came before him. How he would love the birds! David would no more touch a nest of fledglings, than he would crush his own finger,—and he recalled having seen his little son trying to straighten out a small pink cactus that had been crushed by the hoof of a cow,—how he had fondled it with his small hand, saying, "Poor little fang! Did it hurt him, Pop?"

The slow scrubbing interspersed with remanences came to an end and quietly mounting the uncovered stairs—not wishing to disturb his sleep-

ing wife—Underwood crept to the bedside and looked down upon the almost childish head that was turned, partly burrowed in her pillow.

"How lucky I am!" he again reflected, as he stretched his long limbs beside the warm, gentle body and pulled the quilt over him.

Betty was not asleep. She, too, had journeyed far while she waited and listened for her husband's step on the stairs,—back and beyond the days she had shared with this restless, though lovable man,—back to the happy, carefree age of sixteen when to be with her dear mother and dad in their cosy mountain home, was to own the world and everything in it.

"Mother is such a dear!" she thought, affectionately. "I must have been a trial when I refused to stay at school, but Vancouver was so far away,—so far from all she loved. She recalled long, roping rides over table lands,—over the boulders and fallen trees, always one jump ahead of any companion she had. It was impossible to remember when she had learned to ride. She had always seemed able to sit the saddle and had no fear of falling, though she had experienced many a timorous jolt before her pet horse was completely docile."

The faces of her parents flashed before her in the darkness. From a very early age, being the only child, Betty had been both son and daughter to those parents, and their lives were closely interwoven with hers.

Jim Kinnear had been a fairly old man when he married his Caroline, and their child was given to them when both were mature. Betty's mother had been a teacher, artist and writer. When she met

her tall, good looking cow-puncher in Vancouver, he had seemed to fit into her life of writing and painting alike. The fact that he was a few years older and had lived a life vastly different from her own, had only tended to add to his appeal. And he was charming. His golden-brown hair, touched with its first bit of gray at the temples, deep set eyes, the blue of heaven, and a face that was strong and kind,—such was the picture he had made on her mind, and so she had described him when writing to her people back in England. This was the way she had pictured him in her heart and on her canvas. In the quiet of that prairie chamber Betty, their child, felt for the first time a twinge of nostalgia.

Wide-eyed upon their bed this couple lay, each waiting for the other to speak, each knowing instinctively, the fulness of the other heart, yet hesitant to break the silence. Through the window opposite them, Underwood was watching the shifting clouds, as a light wind blew down the dusty plains.

And then he spoke. "Guess you know what I'm thinking," he said drowsily. "My wanting to be on the go this time has little to do with the old man downstairs, though I've been wondering to-night what brought him, with his story of trapping and timber,—the things I've been longing to do again! But it's to get away from this horrible winter and the dreary fall that's on my mind!—the times when you are left alone, weeks at a stretch, while I'm chasing cattle hundreds of miles away. These are the things that bother me,—these, and the thought of more sand-storms, scorching sun with nothing in the shape of trees but those scraggly

cottonwoods along the river flats, dysentery!—How sick of it all I am! And I know you are, only you can keep going with all of it stored up inside, while I can't! I've seen what this does to prairie women and I don't want it to happen to you."

For several weeks Betty had longed to discuss these very subjects with her husband, but she had waited, sensing the turmoil already at work in his mind. It was not so much that she had been left alone for weeks on end, that she minded, knowing and understanding the nature of her husband's work, she expected this, it was those anxious and endless days and nights when she was carrying her children that had acutely tried her,—with the doctor twelve miles away, and even when called, often too busy to be of much service. It was these things which had made motherhood a thing of dreadful anticipation, with the only other human beings she could call upon, six miles down the trail—a woman whose solitary and childless existence made her less than useless in such emergency, and her dearest friend, Grace Miller, a hard bitten, tired-out nurse who had her fill of nursing and had come west to recuperate by turkey raising, her rustic freight-car abode being a considerable distance in another direction.

Nothing had turned out as Betty had expected, and yet she had not complained. Should she speak now, and say she was preparing for their fourth child? Could she add to the worries of her husband by telling him this? What had he said a few moments ago?—"I've seen what happens to prairie women, I can't let that happen to you!"

She knew what he meant. He referred to that which happens to so many prairie women who are

shut away from civilization for months and years. She had not forgotten the babbling, staring, wild-eyed woman she had seen the spring before, as she was carried away from her home and children to a place for mental care.

No, she would keep her secret for the present, she decided. She had travelled before when pregnant, and she could do it again.

CHAPTER

III

"Do you reckon you'll be settling around here?" asked Underwood of his guest, next morning.

"Can't say," replied old Tim, who was sitting on the step of the porch, packing his pipe. "Gotta see a doctor 'bout ma back mighty soon. Damn near kills me when ah lift ma self up!"

"Too bad!" exclaimed Underwood. "We'll get you into town today somehow, I guess. Doc Martin—that's our medical man round here—is all right,—that is, if we can catch him sober."

"Seems like that's some reputation for a doctor, ain't it?" asked Tim, scraping his hand across his stubbly chin. "Now with a feller like me . . ." he cocked an eye sheepishly . . . "Well, that's different! Nobody gives a damn what ah do!"

A slow wistfulness crept into his voice as he spoke. "Roamed 'round a lot in mah time. Met

a lot of women folk, too, but ah never met one that wanted to live in these here parts. That's why ah says a little nugh now an' then's all right fer me."

"Maybe things would have been better, been different, if you'd had a good woman to live with," said Underwood.

"Umm-un! Mabe so, mabe so," was Tim's only rejoinder, and fishing into an inside pocket, he brought to light a puny bottle of whiskey. Holding it high against the sun first, he then twisted out the cork, turned the bottle upside down and shook it.

"See that?" he exclaimed. "Empty as hell" . . . I ain't had a good drink for nugh on a month." He hurled the bottle across the yard. "One whole month and not a drink ain't good fer nobody, ah always says, but since mah stomach went corky, it's been mah poison."

Old Tim shrugged his shoulders and sat slumped on the porch step, his eyes staring straight ahead into the plains.

"Why not give the stuff up?" inquired Underwood, kindly. "You mighthn't need a doctor then."

Tim raised his smoky eyes, gazed around, and then cocking his unknotted head to one side, asked, "Say, young fella, you the person 'bout here?"

"No, I'm no person," answered Underwood. "But I've seen what that fire water does to us fellas out here. Never liked it myself, but I've got two boys, and I don't reckon on having them buck up against such drinking guys as I've met."

Tim pulled on his pipe some deep, throaty pulls, spat through his broken teeth, but did not speak.

"Might be the way I was brought up," continued Underwood. "I've met lots of women, too,—

hard working prairie women with men who spent every cent they could muster for booze, and all they got out of life was raising kids, and loneliness. That's my main reason for hating the stuff, Muster."

Underwood sat down on the plank steps beside his guest, and threw one arm across the stooped shoulders. "I wasn't criticiung," he said, apologetically, "I meant no harm. Perhaps I don't blame you too much either, knowing you had to ease your heart-ache with somethang' I understand."

Tim was smiling again, crookedly,—the smile a bit sardonic as he said, "So yer one o' them philosopher fellers, too, are yeh? I call yeh a blasted person and yeh call me a soak! Guess, maybe, we're even, ain't we?"

Underwood answered with his characteristic slow, "Oh-o-o!" and gave the old man a friendly slap on the back.

"Ain't had anyone interested in me fer so long, it kinda set me thenkin'," continued Tim.

The stooped shoulders lifted and fell. One hand went casually to his inner shirt pocket and drew out a crushed and souled envelope, brown with age, from which he extracted two faded snapshots. These he handed to Underwood.

"Ah wasn't so bad then," he said, as though in defence of something he once stood for. Getting to his feet with considerable difficulty, and standing as straight as two rheumatic legs would permit, he held himself poised for whatever unexpected comment might come. There was a note of wistfulness in his voice as he said, pointing to the snapshots. "Wouldn't believe that were me, now would you, eh, soak?"

"Not exactly," admitted Underwood, gazing with interest at the photographs. Both pictures were of the same man, who seemingly stood a half head above the Tim who actually was before him. There was a muscular fullness of shoulders and chest that was impressive,—the unimpressiveness of a well trained soldier. The round, happy face was a bit bold, perhaps, but self-confident and attractive. And he was in the uniform of the United States Army.

"That's me all right!—Thomas Fielding Judd,—Sergeant Thomas Judd, as yeh can see by mah stripes," and Tim pointed to the three stripes on the sleeve of the uniform he was wearing in the picture.

"So you're an American and a soldier?" exclaimed Underwood, as he passed the snapshots back to their owner. "My hat's off to you, sir!"

Slowly old Jim's gaze fell as he seated himself on the step.

"Maybe ah said too much 'bout mah self, son," he said. "Ah's American, sure 'nough, born down Texas way. But ah's no good soldier, that is, fer long ah wasn't." And Tim raised his fist and brought it down with a thump on his rheumatic leg. "Ah hate's war and killin'! Hate it like ah hates hell!"

"I hate it, too!" Underwood extended one hand and touched the old man gently. "No-body's asking questions, master. I'm a great hand to mind my own business. Remember that." Turning without further comment, he walked to the corral and saddled his horse.

Tim sat in silence, watching the children about the kitchen garden and yard, each occupied with

his usual light task of gathering the wood to fill the wood-box, or pulling the fall's remaining vegetables. They enjoyed doing these things which tended to help their mother, who seemed to need rest more often as the days went by.

Young Ray came towards the stranger, smiling broadly, showing strong, white teeth and a deep-set dimple. His face was decidedly like his dad's, and old Tim turned to greet him, looking up into the rosy, high-cheeked countenance, with its slightly scrubbed nose. The boy carried a bunch of long, golden carrots, which he had just pulled from the clay-like soil.

"Have a carrot, master?" asked the lad, choosing one from the bunch and giving it a few scrapes with his jack-knife before passing it on to Tim's outstretched hand.

"Have to have your vitamins, you know, master," continued Ray, with his happy grin. "Teacher says raw carrots are good for us."

"Is that so now, young feller?" chuckled the old man as he bit into the carrot from the far corner of his mouth, tipping the artificial plate to one side, then twisting it back into place with his tongue. "Guesseh haven't read much 'bout what's good for us and what ain't. But eh likes 'em raw!"

And Tim chewed and talked at the same time, while explaining that where he came from he seldom cooked his food, excepting his meat and the occasional fish given him by the Indians, since he hadn't been well enough to hunt for fish for some time.

"Where do you live, master?" questioned the boy, deeply interested.

"Way back there," replied the old man, "where

the sun goes down . . You'd like it out there, boy. Great tall timber to climb!—squirrels as thick as beetles' pelts fairly high at times, then again as low as ten cents each!"

Raymond's eyes widened as Tim talked.
"Raccoon skins," Tim explained, "bring as high as four dollars, fox skins average 'bout the same."

Setting down beside the newcomer to his home, Ray became engrossed in his tales of that seemingly far-off country which to him, sounded like fairy-land. He remembered tall trees, mountains and lakes, which he had passed when his family had travelled from Kamloops east to the prairies. But he had been too young when living in those parts to experience the joy of climbing those trees and watching birds build their nests. But there was very much of his father's spirit in this boy of the plains. He was studious and keen. On the board wall beside his bed, were coloured maps of many countries, and there were also road maps, especially of the country that was now his home. These were dotted with pins, marking the districts where he had lived, sometimes for very short periods like months, two years, or more. On Saturdays when his grandad had taken him to Estevan to see the movies, he had sometimes seen big redwood trees pictured, and his boyish desire had sprung up anew to live again where he might actually touch those giant trunks and watch the squirrels hopping from branch to branch.

As he listened to tales of the Caribou where Tim had eked out an existence, the same desire rose again, and he longed more than ever to return to that island of forests.

"Are you going back some day, master?" asked the boy.

"Ah don't know, little fella," said Tim thoughtfully. "Ah reckon it's bad business livin' by onesel'. Ah ain't well no more. Besides, there's no one near where ah live, 'cepting Indians."

Young Ray's eyes sparkled. "Did you say Indians? real Indians?" he exclaimed excitedly.

"Yep", replied Tim, "real honest-to-goodness Indians, - and that's what ah mean. Them Indians wouldn't touch anything that don't belong to 'em more'n they'd cut their arm off! Yeh know, boy, them Indians passed right by mah traps every day fer months and never the once did they touch 'em, 'cepting to bring in mah catch. But let me say, boy" and Tim's artificial plate rattled and almost fell in his excitement. "the only traps ah ever lost was taken by a white feller!" Yes, sure! — Mah best friends are Indians, every time!"

All this was keenly interesting to young Raymond, who had learned something about Indians of the prairies and the western provinces.

During the long winter evenings, he had revelled in the stories told by his father, who had met members of the various tribes and learned much of his trick riding, steer wrestling and other stunts from the Indians while visiting rodeos in Calgary.

It had always seemed like a dream to Raymond when his father told of the upper waters of the vast Saskatchewan river, — how they curved through the rolling hills and down into the lower country, surging not more than two miles from his own yard. He remembered how he and Jean had cuddled up beside their father, just a bit afraid, as he told of the mighty winds that seemed to come

out of the Nowhere, and blow and blow, and how once upon a time they had caught the glorious feathers of the medicine man's headdress, and blown it high into the clouds where it was never found.

This would not have been so bad, the story continued, "but at the time," his dad had said, "the medicine man was dancing his special dance which he believed would heal his Blackfoot Chief. To lose his headgear at such a time was more than he could stand, so he fled into the great forests and was never seen again."

The story had fascinated Ray, along with many other tales, -those of the tribes his father had encountered, who had been ambitious and built fine homes, owned mines and trading posts, driving big cars and educating their children. There were many such men among the Crees, Utes, Algonquins, Sioux and the Micmacs. There were also the bad red men who were whiskey traders, horse thieves, and those who were just nothing at all. Now the boy was hearing of other Indians—in the Caribou.

"A finer lot o' red-skins never lived!" Tim exclaimed emphatically, "especially old Chief Black-wing. Gonna muss him, a heap, if ah don't go back to mah valley . . ."

CHAPTER

IV

From where Tim stood, his hand shading his eyes, could be seen a few roads and trails in every direction, some winding and climbing, with others angling off at intervals to wheat ranches. To the far south there loomed, like a blue mirage, some distant mountain peaks.

"Must be Snakefoot Range," Tim thought, as he figured the distance in his mind. Then his roving gaze shifted back to the severe and motionless plain.

There was no smell of spruce or mountain pine here, and but for the glistening thread of the winding Saskatchewan, which slashed its way through parched and crusted lowlands, everything seemed dead. There was no sign of bird or creeping animal, though holes, pitted along the dusty banks, were numerous. Gopher holes!

Across the river stood one ranch house, low and long, and drab for want of paint, surrounded by the customary clutter of unused and used machinery, carts and sheds, and corralled cattle land.

As Tim changed position, a faint curl of smoke came into the picture. It was at least five miles to the east, near the bend of the river. Then a roof became visible,—that of Underwood's nearest neighbour.

"That's my Grandad's place," said the boy, who had been gathering the stray, faded pink blossoms of the cactus now showing a touch of fall—while Tim scanned the country side. "Grandad weighs all the grain for hundreds of miles around, then he takes it on the ferry to the other side of the river. He works for the Government, but he has the finest gardens, all his own."

"What does yer Grandad grow over there by the river?" asked Tim, interested in knowing what could grow in soil so apparently dry.

"Oh, he has four acres of potatoes in one patch," exclaimed Raymond, enthusiastically, and continued: "Some of those spuds weigh two pounds! You should see 'em."

He described the twelve-inch carrots and parsnips, telling his listener that the length of some of these was so great that half was left in the ground when they were pulled—had to be ploughed out sometimes. He went on to explain how vegetables were kept from freezing during the bitter winter months, by being kept in a cellar that sounded to Tim like a small sized mine. This cellar, Raymond said, was lined four or five feet deep with straw and there the vegetables were kept intact for many of

the wheat ranchers, who had no convenient means of raising them.

"And right next to Grandad's place there's a turkey ranch!" Ray informed Tim.

"A turkey ranch!" exclaimed Tim. "You don't mean to tell me! —and ah thought everything 'bout this here place was dead!"

"A woman runs it, mostly by herself, excepting rounding the turkeys up for crating."

Ray saw that his listener was puzzled, so he hastened to explain that the woman was a nurse, who had taken sick back in Toronto, and her doctor had sent her out to a place that was dry and warm. He told Tim of the discarded box-car she had bought and how his dad had hauled it from the station with a tractor and helped to make it into a house. She now had a stove and a sink, just like mum's and Grandma had given her a wolf pelt for her bedroom.

"You should see inside it," said Ray, "all fixed up with curtains with red flowers all over 'em, and boxes of flowers nailed under the windows outside! Gee! —it's pretty. Grandad made her boxes and filled 'em with earth from the river. Don't need fertilizer with that earth, you know!"

But Tim didn't know any of these interesting and highly essential things about prairie life, and so he watched the boy's expressive face, he realized that young Raymond had lived and absorbed far beyond his years.

The boy's story had amused the old man. He had no idea that a woman, such as the one he pictured, could leave the city with its frills and be content in a place like that.

"Sure, she might git a living with her turkeys,"

he said to himself. "But, hell, what else would she git?" Then thinking more soberly, he asked himself, half aloud, "What else would the woman want?"

Tim was, however, a bit curious. Turning to his young companion he asked "Where does this woman sell her turkeys?"

"She sells 'em all right,—over three thousand of 'em every year, and for a dollar apiece!"

"Yeh mean she gits a dollar per head for them birds?" asked the man, scratching his head thoughtfully, through the crown of his hat.

Then Ray told him more about the activities on the turkey ranch, of how his dad had helped each year in rounding up the turkeys, as though they were cattle, catching them in their corral, crating them and carting them off to the train, — "all a-gobblin' like!"

"Sells 'em with the feathers on," mused Tim. "Well, by hecky, guess ah ought like raise a few o' them birds myself!"

"I gotta get back," said Ray, suddenly realizing they had been away nearly two hours. The man and the boy started down the slope, along the narrow foot-path, picking their way between stubby cactus and dusty sage-brush.

In the meantime, Underwood had been attending to the week's regular supply of water. Driving his low cart with the three caisks to the river, he had proceeded to fill them with the clearest of the water by wading out in the current with his bucket,—out where the brown muddy water had a chance to swirl away.

This burdensome task had been one more reason for Underwood's desire to get away from

prairie life. In summer it meant hauling the water, boiling it and keeping it cool. In winter less was carted, as the snow and ice were melted or gave sufficient water for sanitary purposes. Several times Underwood had tried to strike water on his land, but to no avail. There was a foot or two in the last well, after going down sixty feet, but it had soon settled into the earth again, leaving the empty pit for other purposes, such as keeping butter and meats cool and free from rats,—those pests that picked up the plague from gophers, and carried it into so many homes.

Previously, the bounty paid for gopher's tails, had helped out in many small ways. The children, too, learned to shoot them with their small rifles,—good practice for those living in the vicinity of timber waves, the father had told them. But that bounty had been discontinued on account of the plague danger.

Musing, as he drove towards home, Underwood's mind slipped from scene to scene in his prairie life. Finally, from the back of his mind came thoughts of his wife. He could see her as the girl he had first known, standing beside her father at the top of a mountain trail. He thought of her first letter, and the circumstances surrounding it. Why did these things crowd in today? Was it because Betty hadn't looked particularly happy this morning? Fifteen years seemed a long time, with its endless moves and changes, but it was just that length of time since the night he had sat in his father's home, glancing through the pages of the "Family Herald," the largest and most important newspaper known to the Underwood household.

"Now doesn't that beat all!" he had said to his dad, who was sitting across the table in his comfortable rocker, his feet resting on another chair, his eyes closed, which was his usual way of relaxing.

"What's up, Paul?" his father had asked.
"News?"

"No, just reading a letter in this "Maple Leaf" column. It's by a girl who lives in southern British Columbia, on a cattle ranch. She says she's sixteen years old and has no brothers or sisters. She rides horses, helps her dad 'round up the cows, drives the teams and does all the chores a boy would have to do, even to shooting the horses. That's some girl, dad! I'd like to know her."

The senior Underwood had remained with his eyes closed, his head slowly nodding an affirmative reply. Then he'd said, "Sounds like mighty hard work for a girl of sixteen! What else does she say?"

"Oh, something about longing to hear from some nice girl or boy as she gets home sometimes. The nearest post office is a mile away, but she wouldn't mind riding that distance to get a letter once in a while . . . Think I'll write to her, dad," he'd said.

Suiting action to words, he had taken a writing pad from a shelf and started to compose his letter, he remembered.

In two weeks he had received a reply to his letter. The girl of sixteen wrote in a friendly way and revealed an interesting personality,—the out-of-doors type, but domestic, too. She had described her father whom she seemed to adore, and with whom she had, apparently, a great deal in common. He had worked for years, she had said, with the Douglas Cattle Company in the days before there

was a railroad in British Columbia. She'd described the cabin home her dad had built, high on a mesa of considerable size, during the time he rode for the cattle company. Of her mother she'd written, "Mother was a teacher in Vancouver when young. You would like her. When dad brought her to the ranch, he brought her piano, too, because she played and sang, and dad loves music."

But the part of the girl's letter that had particularly interested young Basil was that relating to her father's riding for beef cattle that spent their summers high on the mountain and had to be brought down, through the timber, to the hay meadow for the winter. What a welcome change that would be from prairie round-ups, he'd thought, for at times the open range was tiresome to the oldest cow-hand.

It had been the second letter that had caused him to think less of the change of scenery and the idea of cattle raising, and to dwell more upon the writer. Girls had meant little in his life—not that he'd disliked them, but there had been so few women within fifty miles of his home. Those he had seen—outside his sister and mother—had become snared to the trials and hardships of prairie life,—their faces hardened by sun and dust and the scanty supply of alkali water. The thought of meeting another girl, perhaps like his sister, Val, an all-round, out-of-doors girl, yet one who liked to read, sing and cook had had an effect on his imagination.

That second letter had read "Mother having been a teacher, has not allowed me to spend all my time outside with dad. I have to study every day, also paint, though mother knows I can never

be an artist. I like to read and have read everything I am allowed to read. I went to school in Vancouver, but it was too lonesome there. I missed my home, the animals and my horse. I said I couldn't stay, so dad came and got me."

It had been some time before he had answered that letter, he remembered. He had not known then, that the girl of the "Maple Leaf Club" had often ridden her mile of mountain trail, summer and winter, only to hear the cheery postmaster say, "Sorry, miss, no letter today!" Neither had he realized at the time, that Betty Kinnear (that was her name) had been able to learn from the few letters he had written her, much of the make-up of her correspondent, the restlessness he could not hide, and the great longing to travel and to see things, new things!

In one of his letters he had said, "No fellah wants to be a preacher just to please someone else, and that's what my folks want. A guy has to feel something deep inside if he is to tell the other fellah how to live . . . Besides, there's no fun in not being able to say a meanly 'dam' now and then, now is there? But my folks don't believe in cuss words,—do yours?"

Today, Basil also recalled his last letter to his friend. He had said he was planning on making Calgary in time for the stampede. After that, if he could make it, he might drift as far west as Kamloops and look her up. He gave a Calgary address.

He recalled how he and his friend, Pete,—a good-hearted, but rather lazy kind of fellow, had started out on the trip to Calgary. Their horses had been sturdy beasts, captured from the herd and

broken to the saddle that very spring. Then he visioned, with a smile, the difficulty they had experienced in getting a saddle on Pete's horse the first time. It had taken four men to hold the beast, then, Pete had tried to mount, being tossed several feet in the air, only to come down in a tail spin, landing flat on his face in fresh horse manure and mud. As he'd struggled to his feet, he had been spitting and clawing his mouth and eyes. The horse had been most of a mile away!

"That damn animal can't do the like o' that to me!" Pete had exclaimed. But the same thing had happened many times before the two young men reached Calgary. Pete's horse had never lost his wild expression or his desire to bolt when he'd seen the saddle coming his way, but he had proven to be a match for any cow-puncher's steed in the country. So Pete had overlooked his deviltry and had not turned him loose on his native plains.

Basil and his friend Pete had called those days at Calgary "the time of their lives." After the stampede had come the rodeo, the sorting and branding, steer wrestling, buck-jumping by cowboys in gay coloured costumes. Herdsmen had been there for miles around and also Indians from every tribe in the west. They had seen their first real trick shooting at that last rodeo, when an Indian girl had twisted and turned her supple brown body into every unimaginable position, and with each turn, had made a bull's eye. Their fun had ended when Basil had decided he would go on alone, to seek out that table-land ranch and meet the Jim Kinnear he had read about in Betty's letters.

The horse-like face of his friend, Pete, with its

tobacco bulged cheek, came back to Underwood's stand now, as he jogged towards home. He turned in at the back of the house and backed up to the raised platform where the casks were stationed.

There on the step sat old Tim, packing his pipe, and trying hopelessly to clutch it between his broken dentures.

"Guds ah better hit fer the town," he said, although not very enthusiastically.

"What's your hurry, mister?" questioned Underwood. "You're as fit as a fiddle! The doc's coming near here today, so I heard up river."

"Umm-m-m," came the low murmur, though a half smile lit up his face. Then with a complete change of subject, he said, "Some turkey farm over yonder?" twisting his head towards the hills.

"Yes, there's money in those birds, and they'll need a man very soon now! Nearing to Thanksgiving, you know," said Underwood. "When you're feeling better you might get a job there."

"Doun' what!" asked Tim. "Ah couldn't round up them there things, like your boy tells me."

"There's plenty to do besides that," Underwood explained. "There's the making of crates, the shipping and putting in of grain for the spring feeding. That's a job for two men, and there's only one to do it this fall. Nurse Miller—the woman who owns the place—makes a fine boss. You'd like her. She'd be a good friend, too."

"What ah been thunkin", remarked Tim, scratching his whiskered chin, "is where does this woman git her feed fer all them birds? Raise it herself?"

"No, buys it from the mill, cheap," replied Underwood. "then turns the turkeys loose in the grain fields close by, after harvesting. That fattens

them up fine. Besides, they get real feed when the grass-hoppers strike us."

The old man's eyes widened as he asked, "Grasshoppers, yeh say? Now that does sound like yer scripture stories, how they come and eat the crops!—Ain't that thick, are they?"

"Just about, master. They come in clouds. You can see them miles away,—thick and black. Only they aren't black when they hut. They're red, bright red, big fellers." Underwood measured about four inches on his finger. Then he told Tim how the grass-hoppers made good food for turkeys and hens, how they were gathered in carts, and fed to them for days. Trains were often stopped by running head-on into a cloud of them, and the train windows would be smeared with their blood-like innides.

"We use them for bait, too," said Underwood, "when we fish in the river. We'll try it someday, now the river's runnng."

Tim was greatly interested. "There's life here, after all," he thought, "and it might not be so blasted bad either, when things is green and growin'."

The Caribou country flashed back to his mind,—how he had worked himself bent and lame,—the loneliness, and being sick and all. He then thought of what Underwood had told him,—the job he might get on the turkey ranch. Yes, he'd have the doctor fix him up, if he could be fixed, and try for the job. Scratching his head he mumbled, "Can't say ab'd want a woman to tell me what to do, though—"

The water cans were set upon the platform, and Thunder, Underwood's older horse,—so named

because of the usual gurgling of its stomach after eating too much chaff or drinking too much water,—was let loose from his harness.

Underwood, walking slowly towards the step where the old man was seated, was thinking: "Wonder what kind of a place Tim left?"—Timber-cleared land, hay and shade for cattle, he said I reckon I'd like it out there."

Tim's reverie was broken by Underwood asking, "How would you like to swap your place for mine?"

For a moment there was no reply. Tim sat, pulling his dead pipe, tapping the plank step below him with his toe.

"You'd git a helluva bargain," he said finally. "Mah place's only a rough cabin, back in the mountains. Dirt floor and dirt roof!" A place to sleep when it gets too dark to work."

"Maybe, but you have trees and grass, -shade for cattle, a lake where there's fish, and wild berries. My wife likes that kind of country, she was born in it. As for the rest of it, well—we could soon make a decent cabin if there's timber on the place."

"But you gittin' late in the fall and yeh would have a rough time a makin' it through," said Tim, with an expression that might have meant anything.

"Would yer mensus want yeh to swap this place fer mine?" he continued.

"Oh, my wife knows the kind of tramp I am most of the time! I just have to make a change often or bust. That's me, mister! . . . What's your property worth?"

"Don't know as ah can say, off hand. Not much fer the cabin, ah reckon, but the land's fit fer most anythin'. There's stove wood fer a thousand years, and heaps o' pasture land and hay. It

ain't worth much anymore, 'cause I figured the Indians would use it, anyway, if ah don't git back."

"Tell you what I'd like to do," spoke Underwood, a bit excitedly, realizing he had another to consult before striking a bargain—"I'd like to swap you this place with its small mortgage, about five acres of good garden land, the house partly furnished—and it's not so bad a shack as prairie homes go—for your place, and lets say, two hundred cash."

Underwood knew that one could not judge by the looks of a man what he might have in his pockets, therefore he figured old Tim might have saved quite a roll from his trappings and meadow bay. Swapping their properties was risk enough but the two hundred was severely needed in addition.

"Like hell yeh would!" exclaimed Tim, straightening up slowly, and regarding the tall man before him straight in the eyes. "Do yeh mean ah can have this house and land, fer mine, and only two hundred dollars to boot?"

"Yes, sir," answered Underwood, "I believe my wife will agree to it. She is as sick of the prairie as I am. Your place is nearer her old home."

Tim pondered for a few moments. He looked around at his surroundings. It gave him a queer feeling to realize that here was a place that might soon be his. The house would outlive him, he was sure of that. There was a roof that didn't leak, a door that hung on real hinges, and in a shed close to the house there was driftwood, cut and piled, that would tide him over till more came floating down with the filling of the river. In a small building used as a barn he could see a ton or more of cattle bedding. He had noticed none



and chickens running in and out of that. There was also a good sized vegetable garden and a few melons still on the vines.

"What a deal for me!" he thought, "if the feller means it!"

Turning to Underwood, who was waiting in silence for the answer which might change the whole course of his life and that of his family for a long time to come, the old man said, "Talk it over with yer manus, first. Then, if yeh still want to swap, sh'll take yeh at yer word, and ah hope yeh won't be sorry. Extending his brown, leathery hand to grasp that of the younger man he said, "Ah'd like to shake the hand of a good man."

Underwood clasped the hand firmly, with a smile that seemed for the moment to change his face into that of a happy, care-free boy.

Underwood had entered the house with the intention of talking over his anticipated plans with his wife, but finding dinner about ready on the table, he decided to await a more opportune time. As he washed and whistled, he could not help noticing the expression of his wife. The childish chin seemed to quiver at times when she was not conscious of his kindly scrutiny.

It wasn't until late that evening, when they lay side by side in their darkened room, that he mentioned the subject that was uppermost in his mind.

"Well," said Betty, quietly, "I couldn't help hearing part of your conversation with the old trapper. When do we start?"

Her husband did not reply immediately, so Betty continued: "You are glad about it, I hope. It's what you've been wanting for, I know, for months. I've not said anything, but you know how

hard it is for you to hide such feelings, and I've been afraid a chance wouldn't come. This IS a chance, isn't it?"

"Yes, dear," came the slow reply. Underwood spoke with some hesitation, as if he feared that what he was about to say might bring disapproval, although on previous occasions when sudden moves had been anticipated, she had always expressed pleasure.

"I think it's a good chance," he continued. "I can swap this place, mortgage and all, for Tim's place. What do you say to that?"

"Tell me about it, Basil," said his wife softly. "Do you think you would be happy there?"

"Well, you would at least be living in a country more your own," he replied, — "a place where you could enjoy riding as you used to, over mountain trails,—get a little fun out of life, for a change, —like we did those first two years. Wouldn't you like that?"

While her husband spoke, Betty's mind had travelled back to the childhood of her own mountain home. Stumbling over stumps and fallen trees, still holding to the saddle of her own beloved horse, she had climbed these, uninhabited and sparsely vegetated for miles in some directions, rugged and rocky in others, — to where the trees swayed in the breeze. It was the songs of the wind in the trees that she loved. It had soothed her when she felt depressed, just as the sea had calmed and appealed to her husband when they had visited the East the first year of their marriage. To Betty, the vastness, the splash and the roar of the sea had been terrifying, but her husband would stand by the hour and look out over its stretch of

ghstening blue, seeing or hearing nothing else. In the same way, the tall, swaying trees appealed to her. She thought it would be good to go back, even to a part of the past, although she knew that many of her old neighbours—some of them Indians and half-breeds—might now be miles away. The few white people, too, had probably moved on to the coast.

Then her husband spoke again, kindly and reassuringly, of the direction they would take. He told her that they would be at least a hundred miles nearer her mother in the summertime,—as since the death of Juan Kinnear, his widow had left her bench-land cabin and had gone to the nearest town for the winter months.

But although he spoke so encouragingly, Betty sensed the smouldering anxiety of the man she loved.

"It's going to be fine!" she whispered. "It always has been. We have each other and the children, and it won't take long to get our new home together."

CHAPTER

V

Preparations for departure began as soon as it was known that Tim would be able to take over. It was two weeks later when he—as a new man, returned from hospital after a well earned rest, “tonsonialized” and “haberdashed,” a look of confidence in his misty grey eyes. And true to the good-natured doctor’s remark, “a darn good re-enervating had taken place.”

“He’ll make a darn first-rate rancher, that Tim,” said Underwood to Nurse Miller, “once he gets the hang of things.” And slipping the bolt in the feed-house door he turned to let his eyes roam the full surroundings of this turkey farm with its many pleasant memories.

“Oh, I suppose he will,” came the slow reply, “But I sure hate to see you folks moving away! Seems like I’m losing my best friends. Kind of

planned on seeing your chimney-smoke for as long as I stayed in these parts." The deep-toned voice that always rang so cheerfully held a sudden catch in it, a half sob, as she walked slowly away toward her house on wheels.

"We're going to miss you, too," called Underwood, filling his arms with fire-wood and following closely behind the tall, gaunt form that now moved in apparent dejection.

It was not until this moment that Underwood realized how much this woman had meant in the life of his family. Her cheerfulness in face of her own personal troubles, an illness which had forced her from the hospital life she craved,—and ready smiles and jokes when the other fellow was down. And he was realizing how much he, personally, would miss his days in companionship, and work, on this neighbourly ranch. The fading sunset caught the gold-brown hair, neatly arranged under the tam-like cap, as Grace Miller turned to hold open the door. There were tears in her eyes, but throwing back her head and breathing deeply of the night air she smiled again, and her fresh, clear features took on their old look of bravery, and defiance. As her step recaptured some of its springiness, Underwood felt anew his pride in having known this adventurous though courageous woman. He was glad of the chance he had had, to help her through her toughest days. He would not forget.

Of the lives and moves of her nearest neighbours, Nurse Miller had also learned a portion. She had enjoyed the swapping of ginger-snaps for a pound of butter, when Berry had insisted that this was only a fair way after all, both being tied to their work from sunrise to sunset. Grace had no means for

making butter, neither the desire, even had there been a pet cow at Turkey Inn, as she often, jokingly called her ranch-house.

When the stove-wood was placed in its special corner of the box-car home, Underwood turned to say good-night. Words were difficult at most times to the man, but the realization that only a few more days and these small duties were over, left him pressed heavily. Then Nurse Miller spoke.

"When do you leave?" she asked, slowly, as though measuring each word.

"By next week," came the reply, "if we have the wagons fixed up."

"Anything I can do to help?" came the enquiry. "I'm quite the handy-man you know," and both laughed heartily though a bit nervously, as Nurse Miller pointed to the shingles on the side of a small porch—her first carpenter work, slightly twisted and slanting.

"Thank you, Miss, but Betty is about ready. We would like you to come over if you have time. Besides, Tim isn't sure he wants a woman to boss him around. Might help out if you could come, and kind of get acquainted with him."

Again there was silence as Underwood walked toward his horse, slipped the halter from the hitching post, coiled it and threw it over the saddle horn. As he mounted, Nurse Miller called out, "See you again before you leave, and I'll make sure that Tim will be happy working here on the ranch."

Another long week had rolled past. Last farewells had been said to family and friends. Needless to say they were trying days for all, yet each had braved the hours with that stoical calm which

seemingly is an inherent virtue of the people of the plains.

Two waggons had been loaded with their belongings, leaving sufficient furnishings for the convenience of the new owner, and the dread task was well under way.

Together, as usual, husband and wife had built coverings to protect their goods from the dust and weather, as well as for themselves, in case no better accommodations were available at night. Food and water were stowed away, with feed for the horses. There was oil, and two lanterns were installed for night camping and to protect canned goods and vegetables from freezing in high altitudes.

They had planned that the mother should drive one of the waggons, as she had done several times before with natural ease and safety.

This time, however, there was doubt in Betty's mind, as she did not feel equal to the jolting over the two hundred miles or so, of rough, sometimes trackless and hilly country, to say little of driving the horse.

It had been difficult, that saying good-bye to Gram, Grandad, and sister Val,—who had come many miles for the last glimpse of brother and his family—but all had been cheered by the thought that perhaps Gram and Grandad might join them in the west, later, when Gram was feeling better. Of course the life of Val was well occupied by her own little family and the cares that beset the wife of a prosperous rancher. Naturally enough, she felt the breaking of family ties though she lived too far away to miss any daily or even monthly contacts. Any knowledge of the wanderings of her big brother had been more or less based on conjecture, in her

earlier days, therefore any later move was never any great surprise.

Old Tim had felt their leaving, too, as he tried to hide the tear that persisted in trickling down his cheek into his freshly trimmed beard. The house door was locked, the yard was empty, but sitting in the faded and out-dated Ford, was Grace Miller, her arms folded on the steering wheel. She had come to wave her friends good-bye and to take her new manager—as she had dubbed old Tim—back to the turkey ranch with her.

But there had been no turning or looking back for the travellers, when the wagon finally left the swinging gate, passed the little kitchen garden with its remaining green things and moved on West into the trail.

True to her word, Nurse Miller kept an eye on Tim. "Too many eyes," so Tim thought, not yet being certain he relished the idea of a woman boss. There were many things Tim wasn't sure about. For instance, the fact that a monthly haircut was necessary, making a cold breeze on his unprotected neck, being literally dragged to church every other Sunday, sitting in his new, stiff soled shoes. No! he didn't like these innovations in a life that had hitherto carried on for many years without them. But seriously, they had presented a certain amount of satisfaction.

Tim became quite expert in driving the ranch's old tin "Lizzy," as Tim's boss called her battered car. In fact, Lizzy was the first thing about the ranch to amuse him, except for the forcing on of the tiny knitted sweaters on the few tender capons, and the manner in which these lanky fowl clustered about Nurse Miller as she sat—dressed in her blue

over-all—huddled in a flock of them, apparently tamed by her constant attention, singing in her mezzo-soprano voice, "It ain't goana rain no more, no more!" And often, the birds stretched their wobbly necks and squawked as loudly as the singer. "Jacob's coats," she called the knitted sweaters she made from all sizes and colours of yarns. "What was the difference? they had kept her young capons warm and they were ticklish things to raise," she explained.

It was on their first drive to town when Tim got his new suit, a hat much too large—after his haircut—and his squeaky shoes, that he became interested in the mechanism of Lizzy.

"Mah rheumatis won't let me ride a horse no more," he said, "but ah might learn to ride this 'ere thing" And he waved his hand towards the car.

For some unknown reason the car stopped dead in a part of the trail where the ruts were fairly deep. Nurse Miller lifted the hood and tinkered about a bit. Finding everything intact, she decided it must be a run-down battery so she stepped back into the car and proceeded to work again at the starter.

"One thing sure," said Nurse Miller, "when Lizzy stops she stays stopped until she gets good and ready to go."

"Bit 'o the mule in her, ain't there?" questioned Tim, with a chuckle.

"Maybe there is," was the laughing, though irritated reply, realizing the darkness of evening was near, "but sometimes," she continued, "when Lizzy starts, she won't stop! If ever she kicks up like that with you, Tim, just hold your hat and let her

rip. She'll get over it when the gas gives out."

Working diligently neither noticed that a heavy truck had come up from the trail and stopped within a few feet of their rear, until heavy honking began.

"Can't that feller see we're stuck?" asked Tim, turning in the seat and shaking his fist as he talked.

"Oh, doo't bother him. He's a mean old cuss. I know him!" said Nurse Miller, remembering well an unpleasant experience she had had with him another day.

But the honking continued and no sign of help offered. Tim was packing his pipe—crushing down the tobacco with his twisted thumb.

"Tell him to go to the devil!" said Nurse Miller, in exasperation, and hardly had she uttered the words when Tim opened the car door, stepped on the running-board, and with fists swinging, yelled with anger, "Yeh can go to hell, yeh can't. Toot and be damned!" and he slid back into the car, puffing.

"My goodness! you shouldn't have said that. He'll run us down," said Nurse Miller with a jovial twinkle. "You shouldn't swear that way in the presence of a lady. Don't you know that, Tim?" she finished as she looked into the angry face beside her.

"Yeh told me to say it, didn't yeh?"

"Maybe I did, but I didn't expect anything quite so bad," she said.

Tim was silent. He opened his lips and then shut them, firmly. No sound came. He only thought, "Damn women! Never know what they want!" And he remained silent except for a short grunt when finally the car gave a sudden spurt and

landed him and the driver into the windshield, sending their hats askew

Nurse Miller saw to it that Tim spent most of his time at the ranch for two reasons. His health was unimproving with better food than he would prepare at home, alone, and less temptation came his way also to "rup," as he put it, meaning the big black bottle he kept tucked away in his bunk.

Not that Tim's boss was a strict abstainer. "A sip now and then kind of backs one up," she explained, "but this getting pie-eyed wont help you any." And though Tim stormed to himself, he felt deep within him that the woman was doing him good, and he secretly felt grateful. She was more than just a boss, she was his friend, and there were times when he began to wonder what would happen to him when she went back to the city for the winter.

"Underwoods, they went," Tim exclaimed, reproachfully, one evening when sitting before the ranch fire-side, "and me, what hates women, now awondering 'bout bein' alone agin, when yeh go east."

"Let's not worry about that, Tim," answered the nurse. "Wait until the time comes. We'll take care of it somehow."

They spent many evenings talking of the Underwoods, wondering how far they had gone, or, if they had arrived at their destination, knowing much of what they must have encountered. She would look back to these times, too, she thought, recalling Tim, nodding by her fire-side, his smelly old pipe dangling from his twisted mouth, and she resolved that he would be cared for by hook or crook, until she returned to the spring. And here she felt for



the first time in years, "There is someone who needs me!—Something besides a lot of squawking turkeys!"

* * * * *

From early dawn to nearly five o'clock in the afternoon, that first day, the going had been fairly smooth for the Underwood's except for the usual trail ruts which threatened to overturn them at times. Then, when the frequent ten-minute down-pours came, they were literally stopped up. Prairie dust turned to suction clay, holding their horses' feet as in a vice. The waggon wheels, too, were stuck fast, and with each effort to move forward, all sank deeper into the treacherous mud. There was but one thing to do, —wait! And wait they did, until the sun began to sink and the evening chill was spreading across the land.

Two hours later found the travellers making camp behind a low range of rolling hills. All signs of their prairie home had disappeared. Supper of home-canned chicken, brown bread and tea, was eaten by the last pale light of day and that from a small campfire. The children were made comfortable on the freshly filled straw mattresses on the waggon floor. Soon all was quiet save for the occasional snort, thud or tiny night-bell of the horses as they wandered about, crunching the dry prairie weeds.

"You look tired, Betty," said her husband. "Better turn in as soon as I fix things in our waggon."

He set to work spreading their mattress and quilts, arranging the pillows, pushing boxes and crates in one direction, two bulgy barrels in another, and making their sleeping quarters as comfortable

as possible, although there was barely room in them for the expansion of his own long legs.

All the while he was thinking, "I wonder if Betty is unhappy about all this? . . . or is she ill and not telling me?" My God! I wish I were different! . . . What kind of a damn fool am I, any way, to drag a woman through this sort of thing, just on account of my cussedness!"

But the mood soon passed. In his heart Underwood swore that he would make up somehow for all his wife was enduring—and little did he know it's extent—to please him.

With the first streaks of yellow in the eastern sky, Underwood was up, catching his horses and feeding them, giving each a bucket of the remaining water supply. He was whistling softly, and as Betty listened from her bed she knew that he was happy.

Young Raymond proved to be a competent driver, and for the greater part of the day he relieved his mother from a task that was too much for her. Evening found them camping again. The night was black and the coyote's howl was disturbing . . . But at last morning came.

Betty sat up in bed—then slowly got to her feet. The waggon seemed to sway and whirl. She grasped the edge of a barrel and hung on, as a wave of sickness washed over her. She tried to stand—her head held firmly between her hands—but the floor of the waggon rose dizzyly to meet her.

"No-o-o!" she cried, "I can't let Basil see me like that. He must not suspect how miserable I feel."

Slowly rising to her feet again, she dressed and climbed down from the back of the waggon. The children were seated on a long packing box, and

moving to one end, called, "Sit here, Mum! Sit with us!" as Raymond gave the morning fire a few fresh sticks and arranged the water kettle.

"How will you have your egg this morning?" asked Underwood, as he saw his wife coming towards the upturned box which served as a breakfast table.

He did not realize how the very thought and sight of food brought a sudden nausea to Betty. But she did her best to keep smiling, though she did not turn her face directly to her husband's gaze.

"I'm not very hungry, I guess," she replied. "I just want some tea, a little piece of bread will do—so long as you are doing all the housework this morning."

"You'll have a hard enough day, I reckon," Underwood said. "It's some seven miles to the nearest ranch, and the hills are beginning to be harder to climb, looking from here."

Underwood smiled down at his wife, who sat huddled on the box beside young David, his baby head nestled close against her.

"How's Pop's little Buckeroo this morning?" asked the father, kneeling beside the mother and son, with a look of proud possession in his eyes.

"Fine, Pop!" said the boy, "only I'm sleepy."

"Alright, son," answered the father, as he lifted the little fellow from his mother's arms and placed him on the wagon bed, covering him with his blanket. "You have a good sleep and dream of those little rabbits we're going to see in our new home."

As the mother watched proceedings, giving directions now and then as to the placing of dishes

in their respective boxes, she wondered if her husband had noticed her lassitude,—her inability to walk or stand steadily, her greenish-white colour . . . or had she lost some of it since she saw her face in the mirror that was tied to the wagon rack?

On into another day, with no stopping at noon for more than a brief pause for the horses and a light lunch for the children. Surely a shelter of some kind for the evening would be found soon, thought the anxious father.

Again the wagon swayed and slowed to a stop. Underwood turned in his driving seat and smiled back at his wife who was taking her turn with the reins.

"Not far to go now!" he exclaimed. "I see a ranch house off to the south a bit."

"Don't worry, dear!" was the response. "I'm fine now."

Just so, throughout their married lives, had husband and wife always been considerate of each other. This occasion, Betty resolved, should not be an exception. If her husband could take it, then so could she, without complaint. Had she not been happy through the years? Had she not had sufficient food, clothing, and a comfortable home? —far more comfortable than any about her . . . and love! Few women she knew had received the devotion and kindness she had enjoyed!

As they came to the first good sized hill, it seemed the horses could not pull as they had done. When they stopped to rest at intervals the waggon slipped back several feet, dragging the tired animals with them. Underwood did not like this, so he placed heavy rocks behind each wheel to brake them. Then the hills got steeper, and it was

necessary for Betty to climb down from her waggon and do the same, leaving Raymond to hold the reins. So this went on. Up one hill, down, and up another, lifting the stones on and off the waggon at each braking of the wheels, in case the next stop might be in a stone-less location. Underwood, running from one waggon to the other, became anxious over the load they had brought,—anxious for fear it might be necessary to drop a portion of it. And if so, what could they best do without? But on they went. By late afternoon of that second day, the smaller waggon came to a stop on a bit of level trail.

Betty called to her husband, feeling that she could hold out no longer. She must reveal what she had hoped to keep secret for the trip.

Underwood drew up his team and glanced back at his wife, who was leaning, with head down, against the side of her waggon cover. He saw that she was ill. All colour had drained from her tanned face, leaving it that greenish-white she had glummed on the previous mornings and had tried desperately to conceal.

Getting down quickly, Underwood ran to her and took the reins from her cold hands. Lifting her gently in his arms, he carried her limp body to the back of the waggon where he hastily unrolled the mattress and placed her upon it.

Neither man or woman spoke for a moment. Then Betty said, "I guess it's no use, Basil! . . . I can't keep it from you!"

The expression on her pallid face and the way in which she spoke, told him the meaning of her words.

"Do you mean . . . you're going to have a

baby?" the husband asked, kindly though apprehensively.

"Yes, dear" came the reply. "I hated to let you know until we were settled, but it's the driving that's made me sick. The jolting turns my stomach. I'm sorry, Basil," and she turned her head until it rested against the arm that was still holding her closely.

Underwood bent and kissed her. "Don't worry, and don't be sorry!" he said. "This little fellah might be the pot of gold at the end of our rainbow!"

Raymond, from then on, was given the responsibility of his mother's waggon.

There were tears in his sea-blue eyes, but his strong, young hands clutched the reins, as the horse wound his way along the trails. He braced his feet and set his firm jaw in determination to be of help to the parents he loved, not knowing exactly the cause of their new anxiety.

As the next eight miles happened to be less rolling, no great difficulty was incurred, save for the occasional wrenching of the wheels from the deeper ruts and the shifting of the loads, which in Underwood's waggon threatened to topple at times and strike the mattress where his wife lay.

During this part of the journey, Betty indeed felt miserable. Never before, in her first months of pregnancy, had she felt quite as uncomfortable. For brief moments she would allow her mind to recapture a bit of what she had recently left. If she could only creep up those few plain board stairs, and lie down for just an hour in the quiet of her own chamber, what a comfort it would be! Then she would wonder how Tom was getting on in that home,—had he adjusted himself to a comfortable

room with a real bed? How he had protested when her husband had rearranged the boys' room for him! How forlorn he had looked that day which now seemed years away when she had last seen him, leaning on the same garden gate that had opened to him that eventful evening just a few weeks ago. Betty was glad that Grace Miller had recognized the possibilities in Tim, and had promised to keep a watchful eye on him as well as give him work. And here, Betty crawled forward on her mattress, pulled the covering over her and closed her eyes. The sway of the waggon and the clop, clop of the horses' hoofs soon became as faint as a dream. But sleep, actual sleep, would not come. She tried her best to evade disquieting thoughts, but recollections came. As out of a mist, her mother's face came before her, and she thought with longing of the mature counsel she could give her at this time when even the consideration of a loving husband was not enough.

Betty's mother, Caroline, had been born and brought up in old English style. Having been reared under the Victorian concept of things, she had, inevitably, passed on some of its influence to her child. And so Betty had known next to nothing of "the things a girl should know", before giving herself in marriage. Talk of such intimate things just hadn't been, between this mother and daughter. Consequently, Betty had learned about life the hard way, with frequent pregnancies under the most trying conditions and inconveniences. True, she had read everything she was permitted to read in the small settlement library near her mountain home, but the collection of books it contained were of a very circumscribed nature.

Even had there been available literature on such subjects as birth control, Betty would hardly have dared to take it home for the inspection of her parents. Languidly, she remembered her frequent threats to pursue something deeper and more thrilling than Dickens' Pickwickian characters, department store catalogues and the indispensable *Family Herald*.

Suddenly the waggon lurched, and Betty opened her eyes to see the head and shoulders of her husband silhouetted against the sky, with a background of packing boxes and a stove-pipe protruding through the jumble of furniture.

"Poor dear!" she thought, "I'm not much good to him today."

And when it came right down to hard facts, she again thought, "What did Basil know more than she did about the real facts of life?" He had told her that the one time he had broached the subject to his dad, he had been informed that 'all such things were in the hands of a wise and loving God.' To take precautions, he had inferred, would be working against the will of that God. His dad had said 'If God wants you and Betty to have children, He will send them to you. If He doesn't, He won't. We have no right to tamper with God's way of things.' And all fatherly wisdom had ended there."

That her husband might have learned much from his wanderings and associations, had never been seriously questioned. His kindness overshadowed any ignorance of birth control he had shown. Therefore, if blame there was for such hours as those she was passing through, then it was equally shared.

Betty dozed while the wagon rumbled on—

CHAPTER

VI

"That's some God-awful woman in there!" exclaimed Underwood, coming back to his waggon after an interview with a ranchman at the cook-house of the ranch at which they had stopped.

Betty had seldom heard her husband use profane language, and she felt that he must have some good reason for expressing himself in the way he had done.

Underwood had inquired about the possibility of putting up for the night at the ranch house, explaining that his wife was ill and could not travel any more that day. The rancher had replied briskly, "Ain't no room,—not a foot of it! Then, as he noticed the look of disappointment on his caller's face, he added, "Had to put two sellers on the floor last night, right in the kitchen . . . Yeh wouldn't want that, would yeh?"

"We can make out alright, mister, if you'll

let us camp in your yard for the night," said Underwood. "Just so we can get some hot food, and my wife can rest a while." And nodding toward the toppling load, he continued, "Have to fix that cart some way. Any man about to give me a hand at this hour?"

It was during this conversation that Underwood caught sight of the woman inside. The door was wide open and she was standing over a hot stove, stirring something that boiled and steamed, sending its unsavory smell through the long, low rooms and into the yard. Dressed in an uneven, long coarse smock, spattered with grease, and a torn, sooty rag which bore some slight resemblance to an apron, with dirt lined ankles and bare feet slipped into battered and heel-less pumps, her red-lidded eyes looked out from dark-circled sockets.

Her unkempt, matted hair showed signs of a natural curl, but like her skin, it had become coarsened by exposure to sun and wind, and uncleanness. Her whole appearance—although it might have once been not without some seductiveness of the candy-box cover-type—was so sordid that Underwood felt extremely repelled, and his repulsion grew stronger when he heard the vehement oaths she employed in retorts to abusive language hurled at her by those around her.

"I've seen plenty of ranchmen's wives and squaws," said Underwood to his wife, "but that in there caps them all. Better not go in," he warned.

"You mean she's dangerous?" questioned Betty, thinking of the many prairie women she had heard about going stark mad from hardship and loneliness.

"Not that, I guess, though I can't say as I'd blame her, from what I heard from there. I'll

wash some of our own vegetables at the pump over there by the shed " Underwood pointed to a small building where a pump and water trough was raised on a platform in fairly clean surroundings.

From the place where Betty stood, near the door of the cookhouse, it was not difficult to get a good view of the interior. The entrance to another room was visible, then on to another door which was open, into a cluttered yard. Chickens, turkeys, pigs and children, appeared to occupy the same room and yard. A whoop from a child,—a curse from a man, who yelled in fury for attention,—a wild scrambling of hens, —then, like a bolt, came a tin pail crashing across the yard from the open doorway, and there stood the slovenly woman, wiping her dirty hands on her filthy apron.

"Oh, my God!" mumbled Betty, half aloud, as a great feeling of pity swelled her heart for this pathetically lost soul. It was more than honest pity, it was a cry for help to the Helper of all living things.

How could anyone, especially a woman, allow herself to sink to such degradation? Certainly, to the mind of one whose whole life had been more or less sheltered and loved, the question was unanswerable.

"Come on in!" was the woman's salutation and invitation, as she beckoned with the swing of one hand.

"Thank you," answered Betty, trying to force a smile, and thus conceal her extreme repugnance. Though her husband's warning rang in her ears, she stepped inside.

Suddenly there came a harsh and profane command from within the house.

"Lil!" it yelled "Where in hell are yeh? Come here!"

The woman's expression did not change, though she turned her face towards the inner room for a brief moment.

Again "Lil! Where did yeh put my bottle, I wanna know, yeh lousy - - - -!"

"Shut your trap!" was Lil's quick rejoinder. "You've had enough for one day," and she began to push the pots and pans around on the smoking stove, to make room for the kettle she had seen in Betty's hand.

"Thanks again!" said Betty, placing a cardboard box containing her tea and canned milk on the plank table which ran nearly the full length of the room.

"Poor soul!" thought Betty, "not much to live for here! And she allowed her eyes to glance hastily about the place, noting the board walls,— bare, with the exception of a cheap calender or two, and soiled clothes piled high on one nail. A chipped and rusty iron bed stood against the wall of the second room. On it lay a seedy and unshaven man, fully clothed, his shoes caked with mud. The odor of the place was vile. Betty could only compare it to the unpleasant mixture of stale booze and cow-shed, which not even the strong smell of boiling onions could obliterate.

From the other room the cursing continued. The drunken man yelled, "Goddamit, Lil, come here!" over and over again, until Lil could stand it no longer. She had watched the expression of her visitor's face and realized the importance of calming the man into civility.

"I'll kill that drunken rat, some of these days,

"so help me God!" cried Lil from the corner of her slobery mouth. "Woulda' long ago, if I dared. Woulda' left him, only there ain't any place for the likes of me." Her voice had become low and tearful. "Sure I woulda' left, only as soon as we git one kid paid for another is luckin',—and as bad as I am, I can't leave my kids to be batted around by that blasted skunk. Damn hum!"

With confused emotions, Betty listened, not daring to speak for fear of saying the wrong thing, which would not help matters. Her one desire was to secure her hot tea and get back to her waggon. She would let Basl attend to the cooking of the vegetables,—that is, she had thought, if he were allowed into Lil's domain.

But Lil felt differently. She wanted to talk, and at last she had a woman to listen.

"No women ever come here," Lil said, almost pleadingly, as she saw Betty lift her kettle from the stove and prepare to leave.

"I'm sorry, but my children are waiting for a warm drink," Betty finally ventured to say. "Perhaps we can talk later."

"I wish you would, ma'am," replied Lil, "because the trashy men that hang around this place don't understand women. I can't talk to them,—not even to say man about what gnaws at me inside, here!" And Lil gave herself a thump over the heart. "That's why I took to booze myself, when I can git it. Luke gits it, but I have to steal mine!"

Reaching into a low cupboard and fumbling amongst sacks, empty bottles and some soiled rags, Lil brought forth a long-necked, black bottle.

"That's where I hide it from Luke," she said, with a grimace. "I earn my share alright. I

couldn't stand that man near me, if I wasn't half drunk at the time."

"How disgusting!" Betty thought, grasping the meaning of Lil's words as she continued to rave on. "Never had anything but hard luck all my life. God knows I've tried to go straight lots of times,—and I was livin' the best I knew how, when I met Luke hanging 'round the hotel. I even went to the mission, and I could pray as good as any of them. But that didn't last. Nothin' good lasts for me!"

"How long have you and Luke been married?" Betty enquired, kindly.

"Married!" came the sobbing reply. "That man wouldn't marry anybody. He wouldn't work hard enough to take care of a woman for more than a night. His father owns that ranch, and I'm the slave here. He gives him all the booze he want's, to keep him home. He says,—and Lil quoted the older Johnston—'let him drink his fool head off here. It's cheaper than at the hotel.' " "But," Lil continued, "the old man didn't figure on Luke gettin' tangled up with a woman, and bringin' her home. He says he can't understand how any woman would want to live with Luke, even if he is his son."

"Of course, it's none of my business," said Betty, edging toward the door, "but how did you figure you could live with him? You saw what he was like before you came, didn't you?"

Lil's story continued to come tumbling out. "Eight years ago," she told Betty, "Luke wasn't so bad to look at, and when he had a sober day, well,—he wasn't much worse than the rest of them, and, at least, he paid well! Comin' to the ranch to be

his woman seemed a way out of a lot of things, I thought then, but I know better now, and its too late to git out.

"Why don't you go to the mission again, and don't be too proud to ask for help," said Betty, thoughtfully. "I believe they would find some way to help you."

"You don't know how they would kick me out!" Lil cried. "No church wants a woman like me. I tried it. I know! People have to be respectable to belong to churches, or to be friendly with churchy people."

Whatever was cooking on the stove had been moved to the rear, and Lil was preparing to set the table with huge white plates, mugs, tin spoons, knives and forks.

"A nice woman like you," stammered Lil, "don't know how we poor trollops have to suffer for our sins. And there ain't no sense in sayin', go to a church, they'll help you, 'cause they won't bother with yeh, once you fallen down, specially if yeh ain't married."

"I hope that isn't true," said Betty. "I should like to do something to help you." And Betty noticed that Lil was soon to become a mother.

"Won't Luke marry you before your baby comes?" asked Betty in honest concern.

"No, he won't marry me, and I don't wan't him. All he asked was, Yeh can cook cant yeh? . . . Anyway, I need yeh, and some day we might git married,—if the old man kicks up too much of a stink!"

As Lil spoke the last word, she let slide a whole loaf of bread half across the table. It was almost with the swing of a first rate bowler that she did

the different plates, and other articles into their niches.

"Having his kids don't make any difference to Luke," she said, "He's just a ranch stallion. Some day I'll kill him, when he beats them kids."

Betty pondered over what she had heard, and learned. Even though that unfortunate woman had never known real happiness, Betty was convinced that Lil knew it might be found somewhere outside the hell she was enduring. It seemed incredible that the coming of his children made no difference to Luke, that the sight of Lil's pain and humiliation, did not draw out the man's sense of decency or responsibility to her or to his illegitimate offspring.

It was the sight of Betty, the prairie wife, that made Lil realize once more all she had lost. The gentleness of the range-rider as he helped his woman from their waggon, his kindly voice when he called to his children, seemed to her indefinitely sweet, and deep down in her soul, lost though it might be, something responded to this kindness.

From the door that led into the back yard came a curly-headed boy of about two, followed by a mother turkey and her flock. Into the kitchen they marched, the boy clasping a long, wooden spoon, caked with mud and hen feed, his hand, face and clothes soiled with the same mixture, his oversized pants wet and sagging.

Lil turned from her work in apparent unconcern and said, "Get to it in yer box!"—a rough packing crate behind an old sewing-machine. And she shooed the turkeys to their warm nest saying, "they were born there so I let them stay where they're

happy,"—adding in a softer voice, "wish I could do the same!"

"What a dear little boy!" thought Betty
"What a pity such innocence will be soiled in a place like this."

Silently the little fellow stood, his big brown eyes wide with wonder.

"How I would like to scrub him and dress him up!" thought Betty

The slovenly woman left her work and called her child to her side. A momentary gentleness crept into her face and voice as she said, "Well, Tuck, what you been adoin' now?" And she sat down on a low rickety chair and drew the little lad on her lap, removing his wet pants and slid him again to the floor.

Over a line that stretched across the room near the stove, Lil threw the wet clothing to dry, then, with no thought of washing her hands, returned to her preparation of supper.

As Betty was leaving the cook-house with her kettle, her husband arrived with his washed potatoes to have them baked in the oven.

Turning back, Betty said to Lil, "this is my husband." Lil nodded without a word, as she lifted her battered shoe and kicked open the oven door.

"Thank you, missus," said Underwood, placing the potatoes in the oven and closing the door
"I'll be in for these in a little while, he added.

Passing the sink, Underwood noticed the water pail was empty.

"How about a bucket of water?" he asked, picking up the empty pail, as he turned to leave for the pump.

"Thank you!" Lil replied.

In less than an hour, Underwood called for his hot potatoes. The long table was still scattered with bits of food and soiled dishes where the ranch-hands had left their mugs with spoons still standing inside. Greasy plates with licked bones and cigarette ashes were piled high. Half a loaf of bread and a long, sharp knife were thrown carelessly beside a plate of butter, home-made and apparently a full week's churning, rolled into a huge leaf-like shape and showing individual scoopings where the men's warmed knives had dug into it.

Luke's father came into the kitchen for a pail of hot water. After speaking of the extra bracing being done on Underwood's waggon, and the fact that the man helping with the job knew something about cart building, the old man looked toward the table where little Tuck was crawling around amongst the food and dishes, still without his pants.

"Hey 'you, Lil'" called the man, pointing to the half-naked child. "Better put some breeches on this here brat o' yours! He's too damn close to the butter to suit me!" and the angry man reached for the bread knife while Lil, without a word, reached for her son and the dry, but smelly pants at the same time, and proceeded to put them on the chuckling child.

"Look at that there knife," said the man, drawing his finger across its shiny blade. "Sure would have give the brat a nasty nip, if he had a set on it! Killed two pigs with it today," he continued, walking to the stove to eject a long, spluttering stream of tobacco juice into the flames.

Underwood gathered up his potatoes from the oven and placed them in a covered dish. He said

little as the elderly man talked on, shamelessly, though his own mind was full of the squirming child that looked so appealingly into his eyes. Then he said, "Good-night, little duffer!" and left the room.

When the night had passed and the freshly repaired waggon had become a speck on the horizon, Lil stood alone in the doorway of her desolate shack, and once more, cursed the God that had made her.

CHAPTER

VII

As the days passed, the rolling low-lands were disappearing, to be gradually replaced by steepening hills, forming into slopes that reached not less than ten miles up into the lower mountain ranges.

The horses' task was more difficult and their load heavier still, since the rearrangement of strengthening one waggon by using part of the other. It had taken late into the evening for Underwood and a helper, secured at the overnight stop, to make the two-waggon ocntraption hold securely together. The tearing apart and building up from wheels to cover, the hewing of a large and strong whuffle-tree, had not been easy, and for a time Underwood had felt that in attempting to take advantage of his bargain, he might be undertaking too much. Then, too, there had been the problem of his third horse, Buckshot. He hadn't

known whether to sell him to a rancher or take him along.

Underwood had raised this beloved animal from the time he was a sucking colt, and that made a difference between a man and his horse. This man realized it fully, as he glanced back to where Buckshot was tethered, awaiting his turn in harness. How glad he was that he had kept him!

But, if it was trying for the animals, with their now flabby stomachs, it was doubly so for the little family that trudged behind the heavy waggon up mostly every hill and continued the lifting and placing of stones as brakes, that the faithful beasts might enjoy a breathing spell.

After six days of climbing, winding and camping, the real mountains were reached.

Underwood was well aware of the sturdiness of his wife, of her stamina and determination, yet the thought rankled in his mind that she was not quite equal to the labourious task he had imposed upon her. She had always been brave in face of danger or pain,—braver than most men, but there had been a strange, new look in her eyes the last few days, and times when her silence in the dead of night, had made the world seem tomb-like and empty.

"It must be due to the slowness of travel," he thought on the days when roads were found blocked with sand slide, rock and granite which had to be shovelled away so their waggon might pass. At these times the wind had been more bleak behind the plains, the chill of it causing a frost fog which often enveloped the waggon, hiding the mountains close by.

"But wait until you see Paradise Valley!"

Underwood encouraged his family, using the name old Tim had laughingly given his spot of Canbou land "Can't you imagine that meadow of timothy, the creek near the cabin, and the fun we'll have fixing things up?"

And suddenly Betty smiled her endearing and natural smile, saying, "Don't mind me, Basal dear!... I'll be all right once we get down where it's warm." And she rubbed her hands together vigorously, pulled the robe more tightly about her shaking knees, and, like her old self, nestled closer to her husband's side.

Soon the mist lifted and a new beauty spread before them. Towering above them were the peaks of mountain ranges where soft, fleecy clouds drifted or settled upon their summits. As the roads and trails led higher, it became difficult to distinguish cloud from granite or icy snow, as all were there, glistening against the blue.

Many times during the following days, when resting beside their team, preparing meals by the roadside, husband and wife thrilled to the beauty and wonder of the majestic pictures that unfolded before them. Often, too, they thought of those mountains just one hundred miles north,—the table-land ranch of Betty's parents and the cabin home where she was born.

Underwood could never forget the day after the Calgary stampede when he had first climbed that mountain trail to find Betty and her dad standing side by side to greet him,—a look of surprise, yet welcome, upon their faces.

When Betty had noticed a man in the distance, slowly picking his way as though a stranger to the trail, she had called, "Here he comes, dad!"

Her father had turned, glanced down the trail and replied, "Well, I'll be damned!"

When he had completed the half-mile trail to the top, he had been made welcome in the home of Jim and Caroline Kinnear. They had not been slow to detect the deep and sincere qualities so marked in the sober boy-man, who had come so unexpectedly to their home, yet at a time when his services would be welcome. -if, as his last letter to their daughter had indicated, he wished to work on the ranch for a time, at least.

Underwood had accepted the offer they had made him. He was strong and willing. He had worked early and late, always trying to ease the worry and responsibility of his employers, and to spare the strength of the older man. It was not only new strength and assistance that the young man had brought to this ageing couple, but he had stirred in them a feeling that gradually grew into something deeper. He had seemed to take the place of a son. There had been cozy evenings after a hard day's work, and long talks of his family and theirs. It had been of keen interest to Mrs. Kinnear to learn that this new young friend was of true pre-Loyalist stock, whose forebears had sailed to Canada from her home, as far back as the year 1629, and from her native England! Jim Kinnear would talk of ships, their building and their cargoes from this country and that, — the part they played in war and peace, at every available opportunity. To him, it had seemed a pleasure to meet in person, a great-grand-son of one of the first wooden ship-builders, Ebazer Raymond, of Yarmouth, Nova Scotia, and to be told of the tides, — how the crumbling sand-banks where the ships

were built, had long since flattened, and drifted into the sea.

It had never occurred to Betty's father that land had been granted these men of the ship-yards, as it had for generations been granted the men of the plains and the mountains. Therefore, it had been of special interest to have a descendant of those first staunch mariners in his home,—those men and women who had braved the storms in their small wooden ships, finally reaching that stretch of briny water, the Bay of Fundy, where they had settled, built their homes and raised such men as this stalwart fellow, who had found such a warm spot in their hearts.

But Underwood had not failed to impress his elderly friends with a sense of his restlessness,—of that incessant urge to seek for something he could not find.

"What is it, son?" the old man had asked in a tone that implied he would help him to find what he sought, if he could.

"I don't know exactly," had been the reply, "Guess it's just the readiness of my father, and his father, all handed down to me!" Following the sea gets men like that, so my dad has told me. Maybe he didn't reckon on passing it on, but I sure got it,—and plenty!"

"You'll settle down some day," the kindly voice had replied, speaking as though to his own son. "Marry a nice girl, and she'll pull on your bit! I know, 'cause I used to feel just like you say, always looking for something I couldn't find."

"Yer know, son," Jim Kinnear had continued, "when I stopped looking, that something came to me. I have a wife,—God bless her!—and my

little girl. That's enough for any man's happiness."

How these words came crowding back, along with mental pictures of the man who had spoken them! He saw again the beauty of those mountain slopes, with their heavy growth of yellow pine and douglas fir on the north slopes, and on the south, the bunch cattle ranches, with their grain farms, then lower down, the great stretches of sage brush and bunch grass, with scattered groves of bull and yellow pine and poplar. All these spectacles had made a special appeal to the young man, after the drabness of the prairies.

And he had been delighted, too, to find beautiful hand paintings decorating the walls of the Kinnear's homely log cabin, paintings done by the lovely white-haired woman who had come to understand his temperament and the traits his own mother had somehow failed to understand or make allowances for.

Her sweet and sensitive face haunted him. He thought of her as she had looked that day when he had sat beside her on the cabin porch as she wrote one of her latest poems. She had written.—

There's never a trail like the home trail

That comes at the journey's close,
Or when day is done and the set of sun,

We wearily seek repose

Though steeply it winds, who follows it, finds,
Perchance but a cabin gray,

There's never a trail like the home trail,
At the end of a toilsome day

Jim Kinnear had died suddenly, and it seemed that much of the soul of his devoted wife died with him. But the boy had helped to carry on; to



be a comfort to her,—and in the end, he had won
the gratitude and love of her daughter, Betty.

And here they were,—after twelve years,
together,—

CHAPTER

VIII

"There's no trail like the home trail." How true that was in the life of Caroline Kinnear! It might also apply to her daughter. So thought the man who loved her, as he earnestly desired to reach the home that awaited them now, no matter how humble it might be.

As husband and wife stood, hand in hand, on the bleak mountain side, the setting sun slanting its rays through the towering peaks above them, Betty, too, had recalled those first happy months of her married life.

She had felt the loss of her father keenly, but the coming of Basil into her life at a time when she needed his help, had softened the blow considerably. He was so different from other fellows she had met,—those she had met while away at school and the men who had come to the ranch to work.

Betty had never cared particularly for men, holding them more or less in awe, but the first months of Basal's stay in her home had awakened new interest, and she had realized that life would indeed be dull and empty when he began to feel the urge of hitting the road again.

How well she remembered running their horses down the mountains, through the timber, jumping long fences and rocks as fast as they could take them! A smile curled her lips as she remembered the defiant expression on Basal's face as he at first lagged behind, often tumbling head on into the bush and brush, or wet moss, when his horse,—new to him, decided to keep pace with hers. As she recalled one incident, she laughed aloud, and, putting her arm through Basal's said "Remember the time you couldn't sit down after our first climb up the mountains?" "After all," replied Basal, "you should remember, also, that I learned my riding on flat plains. It takes time to handle a wild pinto on a mountain trail, and the one you gave me was plenty wild!"

Underwood's long, angular face broke into a smile as he continued, "Suppose I did look funny, standing in the stirrups all that way?"

As dusk closed in about them, this wandering pair talked and laughed over the many happenings of those exciting and happy days. The chill of the evening increased and huge piles of stumps and broken trees were gathered to keep both family and horses warm through the night. Water was heated over the camp fire and the horses were fed their warm oats. It was necessary to herd them later, regardless of their tinkling bells and hobbies. But, like stray cats, they seemed to know their way

home, and always sought it, with little help. Then, about nine, the horses were mustered and tied to a tree near the camp fire. To keep them warm was essential, for if they become too cold, there was danger of their breaking loose in the night when search for them would be hazardous.

Long into the darkness, Underwood and his wife lay awake on the waggon bed, the warm body of their little daughter beside them looking much like a bundled mummy.

"One day more, perhaps," said Underwood, softly pressing his cool cheek against his wife's, "and we'll be leaving this devilish cold!"

Turning to check the camp fire, he saw that light snow was falling, fairly covering the already chilled backs of his horses, as well as moderating the warmth of the fire. Several times through the night, Underwood crept from the warm covers and added brush and trees to increase the blaze. By four in the morning, as on every morning through the mountainous part of the trip, he was up, boiling oats and warming water for the horses. At times though, the cold was so intense, that as the horses chewed their food, it fell from their shivering mouths, often covered with a white, crusty frost.

Yet, as the sun came up to warm the earth a bit, new courage came to man and beast alike. A warm breakfast for the weary travellers, an hour or two of grazing for the horses, and a new day would begin.

Actually there were two more such days and nights as the winding trails led them through the snow-capped mountains. And there were places, too, where the snow of the night had gathered in considerable depth, causing the feet of the horses

to become caked with icy blocks, which made the down grades exceedingly treacherous and slow. Again, there were times when the roads were rocky, twisting and scraping the wheels that slid and bumped until it seemed safer for the travellers to walk beside their teams. At least they were warmer, as circulation was better when feet could be stamped and arms swung wide and hands beaten against their bodies.

The wind that howled and cut into the flanks of the horses and humans alike, died down somewhat as altitude lessened, leaving but the crisp, calm air that warmed with the early morning sun. The straining team moved more freely and watering holes were more frequent, an average of some two miles apart. But the water was bitter and alkaline, unpalatable to the horses, and they often snuffed and walked away, preferring thirst to the taste and smell of potash or ammonia.

Though the source of all streams and water holes was carefully determined, there were times when the thirsty children took too much from some small brook, or did not wait until the water had been boiled. This had proven unfortunate at this stage of the trip, and a severe intestinal disturbance had resulted. To attend to the "calls of nature" at the best of times in wide, open spaces, was inconvenient, but under such conditions, with the bitter cold of snow and wind, much suffering had to be endured.

"Once we're out of this forest, we'll hat better roads," said Underwood, after a long, delaying silence when he had studied maps and the slanting rays of the sun.

"According to Tim, there's a small town some

fifteen miles down from here," continued the father, a bit anxiously, as he turned in his driving seat to pat the head of young Ray, who seemed to be the most uncomfortable and ailing one of the lot.

In that early afternoon there was a brief halt for food, though little attempt was made to eat solids, such as the remaining frozen meat and hard bread. The last can of milk was opened, scraped from the can and diluted and boiled,—this as an aid in a moderate degree towards lessening the intestinal discomfort of the children. Feed for the horses was low, in fact, unless a road to the town and valley could be found by night fall, there would be nothing else to do but plod along with empty feed bags and sagging stomachs. Supplies had become very scant the last few days. There had been times when, in order to keep the children sufficiently fed, the parents had skimped on their own food. These had been the times when one had said to the other wistfully "Surely there must be some form of life somewhere near!"

Finally, the team came to a stop at the top of a high ridge. At a sharp turn to the west, nestled in a small clearing, was a town, not more than ten twisted miles down. To Underwood, as he surveyed it, it gave the impression that trees had been recently cut, as the tiny houses and shacks were mostly of new, shining logs and fresh lumber. Sparse saplings and undergrowth were here and there, but no gardens were in evidence. A short strip of rusty rail shot out of the settlement, skirted a river at its farthest end, disappearing into the hills.

Coming closer to the flat country, the town showed mixed habitation. Along the banks of the narrow river, the road left the broken images of

rock and ravine, entering deep green sweeps of willow, and forked to a narrower, though smoother road where the branches swept the waggon sides. Then, suddenly, the open country was before them. Far away now, and high up behind them, the great peaks reared their stony and white-tipped shoulders, while lower down were the aspen and pine-covered hills, rocky trails and roads that had led them down into the sage brush and meadow, spread before them like a magic carpet. Here, at last, were food and warmth! Here the sun was setting and the western sky was bathed in crimson and gold, casting a flame-like glow on the mountainous background.

"My!—what a trip this has been!" exclaimed Betty, as she gazed in every direction, taking in the full sweep of the valley. "Isn't it good to be warm again?" She threw off her outer coat and prepared to help the half sick children from the waggon.

"Yes, it has been some trip," was Underwood's slow reply. "Guess we won't forget it in a hurry! You've been a brick to stand all this for me, Betty!"

Hurriedly, Betty replied. "I'm kind of tired, may be, but I'm only worried about Ray." She spoke quietly, so that the sick boy would not hear her and become alarmed.

"Perhaps some hot grub will fix him up," suggested the father, still partly engrossed in what his family had endured, — up there in those lower range mountains at night, so isolated! — and so cold and quiet! No wonder living things had been few! — the occasional squeak of a squirrel or the flutter of a bird wing on the second or third day of the climb, being the only sounds that had broken the

silence, save the creak of waggon wheels, and the clop, clop of the horses' hoofs on the frozen trail.

Along the river bank were a few smaller huts and sheds, with a smattering of Indian-made tents of weather-beaten canvas and bark. Stretched on poles and frames to dry, were various skins. Streams of blue smoke curled from the stove-pipe chimneys and wigwams, indicating that some kind of cooking was being undertaken by the women of the village, while, standing or squatting on makeshift seats and boxes, were a few dark-skinned men, some Indian and others of various nationalities,—all, in some degree, browned by the hot inland sun.

Lounging near the door of a trading post, some hundred feet away, was another group of men,—trappers, mull hands and trappers, these showing superiority in their general appearance. It was here that Underwood finally hauled up to enquire about food and lodgings.

"That large building over there is our only hotel," said one man, with some concern, as he noticed a woman on the waggon seat holding a small child. "Might not rate much to city folks, but yet from out this way, ain't yeh?"

"Not far away, maybe, as the crow flies," replied Underwood, smiling. "Up Saskatchewan way, two hundred miles will do it." He nodded towards the low, two-storyed building indicated as a large hotel. "Suppose they can put us up for a day?" he asked.

"I'm thinking they can, if yeh ain't too finicky. Food ain't too bad either,—that is, not chuch fusun', just plain-like," replied the man as he spat a long-chewed cut of tobacco over his shoulder.

A long, low veranda stretched across the front of the squat-like hotel. On the lower step sat two cow-hands in shirt sleeves and fringed leather chaps, their sombreros pushed far back on their heads, exposing strong, sun-browned faces that smiled a welcome as they arose to allow the strangers to pass.

A few stray dogs were nuzzling about the entrance, leaving their moist noses chips disregarded where unfamiliar feet might slip and slide, with calamitous results. The small calves, too, seemed to sense the approach of guests, as one friendly heifer left the group and edged her way towards little Jean, persisting in nuzzling her soft, wet nose into the child's hand. This young dogie continued to follow the family, and, seeing the predicament of the newcomers, the cow-hands came to the rescue, leading the tame, but troublesome calf back to its herd.

A short, dumpy man wiggled himself out of a low chair in a room that served as office, lounge, post-office and store, and came forward to meet his guests. Smilingly, they were told there were two connecting rooms available, one fairly large where the parents might make room for their daughter. "That is," said the man, "if yeh have any bedding on the waggon."

The second room was small and contained only one narrow bed, which the proprietor said he thought the two boys could sleep in, though he would have to charge for two. As a matter of fact, the rickety cot would barely hold one boy, let alone two, Betty discovered later.

But Underwood did not feel like protesting against prices. He was thankful to get his family indoors where there was warmth and hot food that

would not freeze as it was conveyed from pot to mouth.

Soon the weary family proceeded to a long room, with board walls, where a tall elderly woman, neat, in a striped cotton dress and apron, pointed to a wooden table which stretched the length of the room.

"Sit down there!" she ordered in a stern, acrid voice, her expressionless face set and cold.

"Strange!" thought Betty. Most of the women she had encountered in districts near her home, and on the prairies—even Lil, the profligate—had been sociable. These women had always been glad when other women came to their part of the country, especially white women. But this forbidding, gawky woman, who stood with folded arms against her flabby bosom, her bullet head with thin, straight hair strained back tightly into a bun, seemed resentful that a woman had dared to enter her kingdom of males. Yet, upon closer observation, the steely, grey eyes told another story as they glanced from one child to another, though quickly, as if afraid of the meagre semblance of mother love that still smouldered in her secret depths.

The table was covered with a much used oil-cloth, its pattern of once gay flowers of reds and blues cracked and mottled by hot plates, spilled tea and coffee and zig-zag knife cuts. At either end of the table were pewter canisters with their customary circles of bottles, vinegar, catsup, salt and pepper. In the centre of the table was a chipped goblet filled with tooth-picks, and a saucer containing a dozen or so of cheap tin spoons.

Instead of the long plank seat one would expect

to find at such a table, were carved-back wooden chairs, with heavy striped bed-tick covers to protect the original upholstering, though the seats were hollowed out like huge bowls.

"Relics of other days, I reckon!" said Underwood quietly, as the woman left the room. "Bet she has a story in her life somewhere!" he continued, running his hand over the carved backs of the chairs. "Too bad!"

The kitchen door opened suddenly with the bang of a foot against it and an Indian girl of about fifteen entered. She slid across the bare floor in her moccasins in ski-like fashion. Grinning down at the children, she placed a large steaming bowl of warmed-over stew in the centre of the table, giving the contents a few brisk stirs with a long-handled ladle.

Again the kitchen door swung wide and the elderly woman re-entered, carrying one plate piled high with saucer-sized gingersnaps, another holding a full loaf of bread and a long, sharp knife. Placing the bread and knife before Underwood, she said, "Help yerself!" in the same cold and indifferent tone, giving the loaf a push with her bony hand. This was followed by the re-entry of the Indian girl, carrying a large brown tea-pot that gave off the smell of long boiled tea, and a can of condensed milk. As these were arranged near Betty's plate, the woman's expression softened for the first time. "Sorry, but we ain't had cow's milk for a long time," she said, patting young David's brown curls. "I'ts out of season now."

"That's all right," said Betty. "We often have to use canned milk where we came from."

The woman continued. "We mostly have beef

cattle, except for a few down in the Indian settlement,—and beef cattle only give enough milk for their young."

With this, she turned and walked quickly away in the direction of the stairs, and soon the clump, clump of her heels was heard over head, where presumably beds were being prepared for the travellers.

The meal was barely over before the children were enquiring for whatever conveniences the hotel provided in the way of bath and toilet. As Underwood passed through the smoke-filled office where several men had congregated to swap stories and barter their wares, he enquired of the manager about them, only to learn that there was a tub in the room at the head of the stairs, but it wasn't "hitched up" for use. He would tell Cathey (the Indian girl) to take them some hot water. Then he added in a whisper, "there's a toilet there, too, only I ain't had time to empty it today." And he gave a few vigorous chews on his toothpick, breaking off a bit and spitting it across the desk to the floor.

When the bedding was arranged on the floor for the boys, disregarding the nickety cot—Basil decided to see what accommodations were in the room at the head of the stairs. The door of the room was standing ajar and was without a handle. He tapped, but there was no answer, so he pushed open the door farther, and entered.

"Holy suffering cats!" he cried, and immediately grabbed his nose, backing out into the small hallway and slamming the door.

For a moment he stood as though glued to the floor. What he had seen was beyond all human

belief. No barn or stable could compare with it.

"Am I so different from those fellows down-stairs?" Underwood asked himself. "They must stand such filth and not mind it, else they wouldn't stay here. But give me the good out-of-doors," he thought, as he went back to the room where his family was patiently awaiting his find.

In attempting to describe the conditions he had found in the small hall room to his wife, he exclaimed: "Why, Buckshot would be shocked if turned loose in there! We'll all take a walk down by the river, after you rest a bit."

Later, when the inhabitants of the town had settled for the night and lights were out and wood fires had burned low, Underwood and his wife lay awake in their hard uneven bed, listening to the whispering of a light wind through the cracks in the board walls and to the deep snores of cowmen, ranchers, loggers and travelling guests. How good to be under a roof, even this one, they thought.

All through the evening Underwood had worried and watched the expression of his wife's face, fearing what she might hear and see in a place where men cussed when they felt like it, stripped or dressed regardless of those about them, and slept with borrowed wives, white, brown or black.

These had been disturbing thoughts although Underwood knew his wife had seen many cowhands, ranchmen and hired men on and near her father's ranch. But they had been different from this lot of bearded, loud-spoken ruffians, who seemed to be on a holiday. As the evening had worn on, cards had flapped to the tune of coin and tanking glass, often accompanied by blood-curdling oaths and rowdy laughter.

"No wonder the woman downstair had become tired of soul!" Basl thought. He had noticed signs of inborn decency and refinement in her pose, her hands, her eyes, cold as they appeared. What a pity that circumstances, or life, had turned poor such worthwhile material! And turning to his wife, he exclaimed "Betty, I hope I never drove you to such morbid hopelessness, --never spoil the sweetness in you, as something has spoiled that poor soul who gave us our dinner."

But he might have been spared much of his anxiety. Betty had accepted her position long ago, and knowing that the present unpleasant situation was only a temporary one, she made the best of it. In fact, as she lay close to the comforting side of her protecting husband, she was not dwelling upon the disagreeable features of her surroundings at all. She was picturing mountain trails, and wondering when she would be able to ride again, --to ride her own horse, one that would be broken, as Basl had promised, just for her. It did seem that her fancy took many backward glances in these trying times, but they were comforting and gave promise of other happy times to come.

There was one incident that had occurred, that would always be a glorious memory to husband and wife, --the evening when Basl had first spoken of his love for Betty, and the silly little incident had set them laughing. Basl had never caught a trout or shot a deer until Betty had taught him how to do so. On this occasion they had set out for a creek where trout were plentiful. Hitching their horses to a nearby tree, they had baited their hooks with the old fashioned worms and had sat down on the bank, leaning their backs against a

mossy stump. In no time at all, Betty had tossed a good half pounder across the grass. Almost as fast as she could bait her hook, the speckled fish had been flung from the pool. In contrast to this, Basil's catches had been few and far between. He was always swishing his line from the creek, feeling certain he had made a catch only to discover that the worm had mysteriously disappeared, and that his line was caught and tangled in the tree branches above.

Old Tim had said that there was a brook near his cabin—and fish. And again the mental picture of Basil untangling his line from the tantalizing branches above the creek where they had fished so long ago, returned to Betty's sleepy mind. She smiled as she recalled Basil's singing of a ditty he had composed about "The Grasshopper and his Shadow."

"Don't think all the talent is in your family!" he had said, laughingly, as he had sung and whistled, though following out her instructions in casting, dragging and reeling in. She remembered his look of boyish pleasure when at last his first fish was landed, and their basket finally filled to the brim.

CHAPTER IX

Night wore on. The children began to show unusual restlessness, tossing in their sleep on the mattresses which the parents could see through the open door between the two rooms. The mother at first put their disquiet down to the extra helpings of supper they had had, combined with the intestinal pains that still upset them at times. Then she heard Jean turning and twisting on her bed.

"Poor dears!" she whispered to her husband, knowing he was not asleep, "It's been tough on them, hasn't it?"

"It sure has," came the soft reply, "but a darn sight tougher on you!" "Kids can take it, and soon forget things like cold toes and frozen butter,—but you've been the same dear little woman through all this home-hellery of mine!"

"Not one woman in a thousand would have

stood for it," he continued. "Why in heck you haven't walked out on me long ago, is a puzzle to me!"

"Darn chump, that you are!" said Betty, her small arm tightening its grip about her husband's shoulders. "Don't you know that all these crazy things you do, are just you? . You know, Basie, I wouldn't want to live without you, crazy though you are!—so why talk about it?"

It wasn't long before Underwood and his wife felt that something besides humps and curves was wrong with "their" antiquated and sagging bed. They became conscious of little things that made them squirm and scratch, just as the children had done, apparently for an hour,—moanung, tossing, and wriggling.

"Feels to me as though we had company!" exclaimed Underwood, as he reached for a match and struck it on the underside of the table near the bed.

"Hell's loose!" he cried suddenly, as he threw back the bedclothes, holding the lighted match high that its small flicker might take in the scope of the bed.

Betty shivered. "Heavenly day!" she cried. "Bed bugs"—no wonder the children couldn't sleep! Look at the darned things, everywhere!" she pointed to the unironed, unbleached sheets where every crease housed layers of the vermin.

Quickly Underwood lighted the kerosene lamp, and the parents soon had the children scampering from their beds while their mattresses were hastily examined. Little Jean had already begun brushing the "little beetles," as she called them, from her nightgown and bed, watching them scurry to the

cracks in the boarded floor. Shaking the tails of their shirts, the two boys stood in amazement, as they watched their father dashing about the room, —the tail of his own night-shirt flapping as he chased from one bug-cluster to another on walls and ceiling, holding the hot lamp chimney tightly over the vermin that scuttled and died in the heat of the flame.

Sleep was impossible for the remainder of the night. Little backs and bellies were red with blotchy, itching bites, and the parents had their share of these.

"Might as well sit up!" said the father, outwardly calm, as he bathed the burning bodies of his children with the cold water from their only supply, the large flowered pitcher on the commode. Inwardly, he was filled with anger, as he realized how sorely they all needed sleep, and especially the woman who was carrying his child. Thus, and the unhappiness of his children for the moment, made him clench his fists. He felt almost as if he would have liked to knock the breath out of the piece of humanity that snored and gurgled in peace from the room down stairs.

Long before sunrise, Underwood had gathered their bed rolls and mattresses and carried them outside where he shook and beat them, arranging the wagon floor again where his family might catch some rest before starting off for their last few miles towards home.

Wood smoke was curling from the kitchen chimney of the hotel and the din of pots and pans was finally arousing the cowmen and ranchers, whose heavy boots creaked and bumped along the bare floors and stairs.

After taking care of the horses, Underwood returned to the hotel where he was greeted by the still half-asleep manager with, "Morning,—up early, ain't ye?"

"Reckon I am," was the only reply Underwood allowed himself to make. He had promised his wife that he would not make a scene, much as he longed to give vent to his feelings, by lifting the bulky manager by the collar and shaking his jelly-like paunch back into his already crowded trousers.

It was barely light when all the guests finally sat down at the long, cluttered table and breakfasted on cold chunks of tough moose meat, greasy wheat cakes, thick slabs of bread and strong black coffee, the sight and smell of which soon sent Betty, quite faint, from the room.

How good it was to be in the clean, fresh air,—to climb into the waggon and curl up on the bed her husband had prepared for her!

"If only this terrible morning sickness would pass!" she said aloud, knowing there was no one to hear her cry of weakness. "For three weeks now I've put up with this awful squeamishness. . Oh, dear, I do feel so rotten!"

A sudden attack of nausea forced her to drag her body to the opening of the waggon where she leaned out, supporting her dizzy head against the frame. She vomited, and then lying back on her bed, closed her eyes with a low, sick moan.

As Underwood approached the waggon, he was startled by the ashen face that raised itself to greet him.

"Poor little woman!" he exclaimed, as he stepped inside and knelt beside his wife, placing his arms beneath her head and holding it close against him.

A slight shudder passed over her limp body as she felt the cool morning air rush in around her blanket.

"Hold me tight, dear!" she whispered, pressing her face hard against his chest, but not before Underwood had caught a glimpse of the shining tears she had tried to conceal.

"Why not cry?" asked her husband, tenderly. "It helps, you know—besides, tomorrow will be better than today." And he swayed his body slowly, holding more closely the head and shoulders that nestled like a child.

"Brave little woman! We'll soon be home!" His voice was strong and confident, to himself he thought, "Would to God it might be a better home."

Outside the children were following a young colt that seemed to enjoy their company as he pranced about them, rubbing his nose on their hands, kicking the dust and frolicking his long, spindly legs. They were not aware of the unhappy plight of their mother in their waggon home, and for this their parents were thankful.

This was the second time in their lives together that Underwood had felt a deepening fear for the woman he loved with the full strength of his powerful nature. How precious she was! How helpless he would be but for her endearing presence beside him! Memories of that other fearful night flooded his mind,—the night they were given their daughter, Jean. It had been in the third year of their marriage, on their small truck farm, not many miles from Betty's old home. Chinamen had settled all about them, gardening in quantities and at prices that made it impossible to compete with them. Thus, in addition to paying high prices for irrigation, and

with increased taxation, had caused them much discouragement and had complicated their plans. Underwood had resolved to make his fourth move while his wife was in hospital for her confinement, and he had planned to have all in readiness in a new house for her return. That time he had intended to go in for cattle raising.

The nearest hospital at which his wife could be confined was eighty miles away from their home and the way was over very rough country. Underwood had arranged to make the trip in three days, stopping off at intervals at small settlements. Husband and wife had started off in their car, which had been made nickety through its use as a delivery waggon on the farm. When they had covered some miles, an axle had broken, leaving them stranded at a distance of two miles from civilization. The jolting over the rough roads had caused Betty much discomfort, bringing on pains that became severe and frequent. To delay until repairs could be made, appeared to be dangerous. Yet how Basil had hated to leave his wife alone in that desolate spot while he ran to the nearest house for help! When he had reached the first available house, he had been told that there was no means of conveyance there, and his heart had almost failed him. Then he had run on for another ten minutes to the home of an Indian, who had willingly let him take two of his horses.

The return journey had been made in records time. Deadly fears of what might have happened to his wife, had caused Underwood to dig his hard heels into the flanks of the horse that tore through the darkness. What if he could not get his wife to the hospital in time, he had thought! What if her

child were born there on the highway, with no help but what he could clumsily render?"

Underwood had known Indian women who had delivered their own children under such circumstances, and, after an hour, carried their babes in their arms to their homes. But Betty had been gently reared. And again Underwood realized the many things of which he had deprived his young and gallant wife. Her care-free days in the saddle had been surrendered without a murmur as children came. Into the life of the woman he loved he had brought much of the gypsy element, but she had snaked through it all. Her wonderful way of looking at life had ever been a blessing to him. Her children were loved, and wanted.

Luck had been with them that time. Underwood recalled the tremendous feeling of thankfulness that had surged up in him when he had ridden up to the truck and found that all was well.

"Could you possibly make the remaining fifteen miles on horse-back?" he had asked.

"Well, dear," Betty had answered, "I can try." She had but her lips as pains returned to torture her.

Lifting her gently from the truck seat and placing her on the well padded saddle, with blankets tucked close about her body and legs, he had said, "Hang on, little woman. I'm with you." And with the handles of their suitcases over his saddle horn, they had started out.

Each mile had seemed to lengthen into ten. Many times they had stopped when pains had been too severe,—but gripping the saddle horn with one hand, the other held fast in that of her husband, Betty had passed through the periods of suffering.

Then on and on they had gone, until finally, when each moment brought her closer to the consummation of her travail, they had reached the hospital.

Upon examination, the physician had found that the abdomen was badly bruised. "Duc," he'd explained, to the bumping against the saddle horn during the journey that Betty had undergone. He had assured the anxious husband, however, that all would be well in half an hour. Now on this Sunday morning, twelve years later, Underwood felt much as he had done on that other momentous occasion. After leaving the hotel, he had driven his little family down near a winding creek, the other side of a small church he had noticed when entering the village. Here, he felt, his wife might become more settled before undergoing the jolting of a longer drive. As the day advanced it was comfortably warm, there in that sheltered nook by the creek, and the sky was cloudless. Rolled in her blankets, Betty felt more like her old self and drowsiness crept over her. Underwood, in the meantime, made a pretense of not being too worried, as he helped amuse the children by building a dam, making dip-nets from twisted rush and catching a few small fish. How good it was to see Betty smile, he thought, after the trying hours of the early morning.

Suddenly, the clang of a church bell pealed out over the sleepy village. Betty, aroused, called to her husband, "Why not take the boys to church? I will be all right with Jean here, and she can keep an eye on the horses, too." She knew her little girl would prefer to remain with her.

"I hate to leave you, Betty!" said Basal, coming up from the creek, still twisting the rushes in his

hand, this way and that, until a well-formed net basket was completed. As Basil passed it over to her he said, "Let's keep it for—him!"

Church-goers were slowly walking along the road from house, shack and tent towards one or other of the two places of worship of which the village boasted. Even in this small community, there was apparently a difference of opinion in regard to form.

The questioning thought came to Underwood, as it had many times before, "Why so many churches? Why so many creeds and beliefs?"

What a world it would be, he thought, if all could but think the same and do less babbling in religoo! Had not his own people believed that they were right in their particular religious faith and that the rest of the world was all wrong? Underwood had worshipped in many churches of varying creeds,—from those with services severely simple to others that observed ritual in every detail, and he still believed that the man who earned love in his heart and a consciousness of the wonder and beauty of the universe, was one who was near, indeed, to God.

Underwood decided to take his boys to the smaller church,—not because of its nearness, but because it had, to his mind, a cozy yet lonely appearance, as though it needed friends. As he and his children approached the building, the minister of the church surveyed them with amazement,—wondered, apparently, to the coming of many strangers.

"Come on, fellers! Let's give him a real surprise!" called Underwood to a group of men, sitting lankly about near the church, as he slackened his pace.

"Wouldn't want the roof to fall in, now would you?" asked one of the men, glancing shyly towards the others.

Underwood continued to smile. "Come on!" he urged. "A little singing won't hurt you! . . . Let's go in!"

Somewhat reluctantly, four men arose and followed Underwood, one lanky cowhand stumbling,

"It ain't my church,—never been in one like this afore!"

"That makes no difference," declared Underwood, slapping the man on the back, as he turned kindly towards him. "It isn't my church either, but I like to sing."

Three other men who had overheard the conversation, joined the group, throwing away their pipe ashes, cuds, and straw toothpicks.

Once more the clergyman, curious eyes almost popping, surveyed the group, as it drew near. Turning quickly, he dashed up the steps into the tiny hallway where the bell-rope dangled, and grasping it vigorously, gave it several excited pulls. Then up the single aisle he went in a half run, seating himself stiffly in a straight backed, overstuffed, horschair chair, his fists resting one on each knee with elbows extended, with an expression that might have meant, "You start anything here, and I'm ready for you!"

As the visitors entered the church and filed into their seats, comprising two rows of cheap, wooden chairs, the parson scrutinized each face, -not surely, but with that same look that seemed to say, "Who are they?—and why all these men who haven't seen the inside of a church for years, if

ever? If they don't mean any boughhouse, then what have I to give them? Can I tell these men how to live nearer their God?

Presently a hymn tune emanated from the wheezy melodeon, a few feet from the platform on which the minister sat. Underwood, with quick perception, had taken full account of his surroundings,—from the dusty toes of the parson's shoes that barely touched the floor as he sat in his uncomfortable chair, to the holier than thou face of the organist. The two-foot square bedroom table which served as a lectern and holder of glass water pitcher and tumbler, was bare of the usual coverings and bore only a medium sized bible, lying open at the text for the forthcoming sermon.

Then the minister arose, cleared his throat and raised his hand as a sign that the congregation should rise. With a scraping of chairs, dropping of hats, fumbling and coughing, the men and women scrambled to their feet and bowed their heads, as the minister prayed.

"Heavenly Father," he began, "we implore Thy blessing upon us. Reach Thy comforting hand and touch each heart in Thy presence. Give of Thy indomitable kindness and power, that we in turn, may give to all who touch our lives."

The atmosphere was suddenly changed from that of amusement and crudity to that of sincerity and reverence.

The minister continued "We do not ask that tribulation be removed, we simply seek new strength from Thee that we may carry on."

The Lord's Prayer followed

Underwood bent and whispered to his children and soon their quiet utterances were heard, mingled

with those about them,—the murmuring of the congregation, the guttural notes of cowhands and trapper, the high-pitched rasp of the organist.

Then again came the wheeze of the melodeon, and all eyes were turned to the hymnal slate nailed on the wall nearest the organ. There was no choir, and the voices of the congregation, scattered and weak, broke out spasmodically, some beginning where others left off. At the last verse of the hymn, Underwood glanced towards his companions and said, "Come on, fellows, let's help them out!" Soon, his deep, true tones gave encouragement. Raising his hat as a baton, he nodded and the men's voices rang out in rhythm with the swaying sombrero.

When peace and quiet was again restored in the little room, the minister began his sermon. His text was taken from Psalm XLII, verse 6 "Why art thou cast down, O my soul?" His voice was strong and full of feeling. He spoke as a man who understood and had compassion for the frailty and waywardness of other men.

As the preacher closed his bible and stood looking at his flock, it seemed to Underwood that his eyes met his own. Suddenly the thought came to him "Could this little man, with the bird-like expression, sense the disquiet that ate like a cancer into his soul? In his close scrutiny, had he recognized the wanderlust that permeated his being?

The preacher said, "No man of us can hope to escape this disquiet of the soul. It dates back through the ages, to the very doorstep of life. It is a disease, with its different and multiple phases; varied and unnumberable causes. Most of us have lived long enough in this world, regardless of where

our dwelling has been, to have tasted of that unrest of which the psalmist speaks when he asks, "Why art thou so disquieted within me?" in reference to his soul . . . I am speaking from experience . . . I know what it is to be restless, disillusioned, disquieted . This condition can do two things to us,—bring out the good in us, or bring out the bad . There is a little angel in each of us, and there is also a little devil . When a man becomes disquieted in soul he does not always cry out, as the psalmist did, 'Judge me, O God, and plead my cause,' as the angel in him would have him do . The devil sometimes gets the upper hand, and that means drifting into some loathsome thing, —drink,—stealing, gold,—women of the saloon and the street!"

Leaning on his folded arms, the little minister was silent for a moment . Then he said quietly, "Have you ever thought about the common oyster? Do you know what that little creature of the sea does when a bit of irritating grit or sand gets under its shell?" A fleeting smile lit up some of the faces, as young David nudged his father and giggled aloud .

"It doesn't rant and gnash its teeth, figuratively speaking, as some of us might do," continued the preacher, "when we find irritating chips on our shoulders! No!—it gets busy and produces a pearl!"

"My friends of these mountains and plains," he continued, "are we less ingenuous than the oyster? And yet we allow the little frictions of life to cause a disquieting of our souls, discouragement with our lot, not only causing suffering to ourselves, but bringing discontent to those we love."

These words of simple wisdom struck home to Underwood and several other members of the

congregation. Long legs twisted, turned, crossed and uncrossed Postures changed and stealthy glances shifted from one man to another Dutchy, the lanky cowhand, took his pipe from his pocket and began to scrape and pack it, until tapped on the leg by the smiling Raymond, who gave him a warning wink.

"What can we do about it?" came the enquiring voice from the platform. "Are we going to allow this human ailment of the soul to creep in and spoil what is left of our lives? Have we not enough courage and strength of character to fight this thing, each in his own good way?" And the little minister struck the wooden table with his fist, the glass pitcher shaking with the sudden force of the impact. "Many have tried, and almost as many have failed, but there is a way to beat it, or at least something available to all of us, which will help us to carry on, if we seek it."

Spreading wide his arms, the minister ended on a pleading note. "My friends, men and women of these hills and plains, remember this. The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken spirit and saveth such as be of a contrite heart. The Lord redeemeth the soul of his disquieted servants and none of them that trust in Him shall be desolate . . . Prayer is your answer, men and women! May the peace that it brings, go with you."

The last hymn was sung and the service was over. Pocket wallets were literally emptied when the collection plate was passed, which brought a satisfied expression to the face of the burly trapper who carried the bountifully filled receptacle to the platform.

As the church emptied, and the minister stood

at the door shaking hands with the departing people, and saying to each one a cheery word, Underwood looked deep into the eyes of the preacher. Their clasp tightened, as the older man said, "Stop in again, son, if you ever pass this way."

"You can bet on it, mister!" Underwood replied. As he passed down the steps, holding a hand of each son, a new look was in his eyes and there was a more determined set to his jaw.

CHAPTER

X

The hands of the dented Big Ben, fastened to the rack of the covered waggon, pointed to six o'clock. The sun had set behind the hills and evening was upon them. The Underwood's had left the little mining and trapping town at noon, and their waggon had rumbled on in almost trackless country at times, until it seemed from the make-shift map Tim had given them, the end of their wearisome trek must be approaching. Surely, by the following night they would glimpse "Paradise Valley"? This was a hope shared by all the members of the family as they gathered about the supper camp-fire.

"Well, here we are,—so far," said the father a little later, as he tucked his children in their blankets.—"Safe and sound and almost home!" and he gave each child his accustomed caress.

From her resting place, Betty had watched her

husband and children as they engaged in the usual
nightly chores,—gathering stumps, felling trees and
brush, and cutting and breaking them into con-
venient lengths, to replenish the fire as the night
wore on.

A winding stream trickled nearby, and the moon-
light began to strike it through the swaying branches.
Underwood stretched out close to the fire, in order
that he might see to chart out the remaining miles.
But as the full moon rose above the treetops, it
illuminated the night like day, and it was hardly
necessary to rely on the light from the camp-fire.
Underwood often raised his eyes to gaze through
the mighty forest, and a look of almost settled peace
spread over his face.

"Trees, trees!" he exclaimed. "How Betty
must have missed them!" he mused. He passed
his hand over the bark of a huge trunk that
towered above him. What a contrast this country
was to the almost treeless plains they had left!

There was a peacefulness about the wilderness,
as it sheltered the wanderer against the bleakness
of open country. At last a wonderful calm seemed
to possess Underwood's soul, and to still his irre-
pressible urge. He sensed it deeply. "Prayer is
the answer," the bird-eyed minister had said, and,
closing his eyes against the flare of the camp-fire,
Underwood prayed.

Instead of the anticipated day's travel, it took
two days and an evening to make the last twelve
miles into Paradise Valley. Roads kept disappearing
into moose trails, then emerging into more
trackless and dense forest. There were times when
the trees seemed to touch and scrape the sky, the
great branches bending and darkening their paths,

and at times their trunks becoming entangled with the hubs of their waggon. Though, with the aid of the unprovided map, Underwood had tried to select the most level country for their journey, it was often necessary for him to drag obstacles from their path, - even to the extent of cutting some trees and filling chuck holes, so that their waggon might pass through.

Two small Indian villages were passed. Then, as they emerged from the forest, they came to another small town where men eked out an existence in mining and trapping. A large number of horses were grazing in a meadow of wild hay where they had been turned loose. Little bells tinkled at their necks. It was here that the Underwood's encountered, for the first time, the Swash Indians, or Canine Lake Indians, as they were sometimes called. The family stopped in this place to rest their horses and to buy or barter for fresh supplies from the white storekeeper, Jackson, who in later years, became a true and valued friend.

It was a welcome surprise to Jackson to find a man who could pay cash for a sack of flour an axe handle or a pound of tea. For thirty years he had dealt mostly with Indians, taking in their furs in exchange for supplies. The bill Underwood passed in payment for the goods bought, was turned and twisted, even smelled, then a slow, broad grin spread from ear to ear of the trader, as he said "Don't see much o' this stuff here! When a man wants vegetables, he brings hay!"

"How about their furs?" asked Underwood. "Don't they sell for cash, ever?"

"Oh, yes," answered the man. "Sometimes those Indians with trap lines back in the mountains,

seventy-five miles or so, bring in from two hundred dollars worth to a thousand, in a winter." He pointed to some articles on the counter and said, "Look at these furs! A young Indian from the lake district left them today. Came in here needing plenty o' things for himself, but they're a generous lot and afore he could buy a plug o' tobacco, his pals had their choice o' boots like these" and he took from the shelf a pair of eighteen dollar riding boots and spread them on the counter. "To his other friends he gave a pair o' chaps that cost him twenty-five dollars."

"Not much left for himself, was there?" questioned Underwood.

"Not much, -but these Indians here are like that. They make damn good friends, if yeh treat 'em right."

"Don't suppose they get much liquor?" asked Underwood, glancing casually about the store, where everything from hip boots to bean-pots was in evidence. In his quick survey of the store, Basl saw, eye-glasses, two sets of false teeth (probably left by some now deceased customer in exchange for goods), shoe laces mixed in with curling tongs and hair nets, cow-hide boots, face powder and creams, cloth material, so stiff and rough it would hold any shape it was put into, heavy stone-china cups, mugs and plates. To make things look more interesting, a wire line was fixed about six feet above the counter on which hung brass-studded harness with a few ladies dresses and slips to keep them company. At the back of the store, was a heterogeneous collection of chairs and tables, with mattresses piled on top of them.

"Good neighbours and all as they are," said

Jackson, with a shrug. "they'll drink anything they can get hold on. Never give any trouble though, and they're honest as the sun. Tell yeh this,—they might follow their trap-line fer miles and not find so much as a squirrel. On their way home, they might cross yer line and find a red fox or somethin' better, but there ain't an Indian among 'em that would pass yer door without leavin' yer catch. That's what faith we whites have in 'em about here."

"I'm glad to know that," said Underwood, "because I expect to be setting down the line a bit,—down in a place called Paradise Valley. Ever hear of it?"

"Yeh mean old Judd's place?" asked Jackson, with a look of surprise.

"That's it!" replied Underwood. "Hope to make it by tomorrow. It's been a hard trip from north of Eaton to here,—that is, hard for my wife and the little fellers." Drawing the improvised map from his pocket, Underwood spread it before the man and pointed out the course he had travelled and the remaining distance to be covered.

Tracing the course with the stem of his pipe, Jackson gave directions, saying that by sundown, the following day, they should reach the valley. "That is," he added, "if yeh can make a few miles extra today."

When the supplies he had bought were tucked away in the waggon, and Underwood was about to re-harness his horses, the storekeeper called from his doorway: "If yeh bring yer family over to the house, guess the mamas might have some hot food and coffee."

So it was that the little family sat down to plates of steaming venison, roast duck, berry pie and tea.

While this refreshing meal was being enjoyed, Mrs. Jackson made friends with the children, telling them stories of the Indian School and the fine work of the pupils which was brought to the store for sale. She told them, too, about the pennies these children earned selling squirrel-pelts, saying they often brought twenty-five cents each. Mr. Jackson went deeper into the habits and ideas of his red-skinned friends. He told stories about the lake just eighteen miles south, where the Indians fished trout as large as forty pounds while in their dug-out canoes, and he described their methods of smoking the trout for winter food. He also told his listeners about the valley old Tim had christened, and how it ran for ten miles with a winding creek which emptied into the lake.

"This creek," he explained, "is the property of the Indians. Its slopes are covered with bunch grass where their horses feed through the winter, running wild. In the bottom of the valley, as much as five hundred tons of hay are cut in the year, some used for feed, but most of it sold or swapped with the few white men who are usually short of feed by spring."

As the covered wagon was about to turn into the open road again, Mr. Jackson offered some further information. "Yeh will be livin' so near this feedin' meadow I told yer about, maybe the Chief will let yeh turn yer horses in there through the winter. He would only ask for a few vegetables, or somethin' else that's hard fer him to git."

"Thanks for everything," replied Underwood. "Maybe I shall see the Chief when I pass through the village," and he nodded his head in the direction of the road he was about to take.

"It's no village," came the quick reply, as though the speaker feared that Underwood might feel disappointed in finding but a cluster of small houses here and there, along the creek. "But yeh can't muss seein' the Chief 'cause he's might fuzzy who comes to live down there."

"Thank I better turn back to the prairie?" returned Underwood, smiling broadly, with a wink at his wife.

"You'll pass inspection, young feller," said the trader, "but if yeh don't,"—and he shook his finger in a friendly way,—"just you come back here,—I can use a feller like yeh, any day!"

* * * * *

He had a poker face and stood with his arms folded across his chest, seeming to pierce both man and beast alike with his sparkling black eyes. His skin was dusky like the nap of soft, brown velvet. His long, sharp nose drew tight at the nostrils as he breathed. There was no sign of emotion, excitement or curiosity, as the waggon made a last turn from the creek and came to a halt beside him who was Chief of the Swash tribe.

As directed by the trader, the Underwood's had turned south into a road not marked out by Tim on his friendly map. This road had brought their course past other scattered hut-like homes from which children, both white and Indian, had looked in wonder. Then, grinning, they had sometimes turned back into the houses to call their families so that they, too, could see the strangers approaching.

"Where you go?" asked the Chief, still standing

erect, his moccasined feet spread wide apart, his face expressionless, except for the narrowing and flaring of his thin nostrils.

Touching his hat with one finger, Underwood said with a half smile, "Paradise Valley, sir! . Bought the cabin from old Tim Judd."

For a few moments there was no sign that the Chief had heard. Then his stern expression softened and he turned his head in the direction the team was headed. His heavy lids lowered as though in deep thought. He mouthed his lips. A grin streaked wryly across his powerful face.

"You friend o' Tim?" he asked, slowly unfolding his arms and stretching his hand in welcome.

"Yes, I'm his friend." Underwood extended his own hand, saying. "You liked Tim Jud, didn't you, when he lived out here?"

"He good white man. We all like him. He went 'way, sick?" Again the strong face became sober. There was a faint tremor in his voice as he pronounced the word "sick."

"Oh, Tim's all right," said Underwood, realizing that some of Tim's friends had been worried regarding his fate. "He's all better now. Has good job, good home. Some day he will come see us."

"What's your name, white man?" asked the Chief.

"Underwood," came the quick reply,—"Basil Underwood. I came from near Saskatoon. Was a Range Rider for a time. Tried ranching, too, but got restless. Had a hand at truck farming, but the Chinamen squeezed me out. Now I'm going to see what can be done with a couple of homesteads."

"I, Chief Black Wing," said the low, half-thundering voice of the Indian. "Not many white men back here." He glanced towards the little family on the waggon.

"This is my wife, sir," said Underwood, as he pointed out Betty. "She is a brave woman and a good mother. We will get along, after we are settled, get our garden going, secure some cattle, and make a few friends."

"My people, good people!" explained Chief Black Wing. "You be kind to my people, they your friends." His keen glance was appraising and shrewd. "My people different most Indians in these parts. Big mission over there," extending his arm and pointing towards the south. "Teach them—my men learn trades, build houses, make many things. Indian women learn cook, white woman's way. They make many things, too. Take care of sick. Big thing for my people. They stay away much time. Ten years. Five years. Mission does good job on soul, too. My people no drink much liquor. Women, no liquor!"

It was with pride and dignity that the fatherly Chief told of his people.

Better homes, farms and living conditions were apparent on every side as the Underwoods rode on taking advantage of the dying twilight. A few of the houses showed ambition for fancy traps and fences. Around others, cultivated flowers made pleasant adornment. There were only a few places where cattle, hens and children congregated in one yard. The more ambitious had cars, well-made barns and corrals, and radios sent their music out from the open doors.

Old Tim had often talked of the Sowak tribe,

but it was with astonishment that the Underwoods learned of their opportunities for education,—their keenness to accept the white man's way of life.

Mental pictures flashed through Underwood's mind,—pictures of the Indians he had encountered in his roamings. They, too, had become civilized, he thought,—too civilized! What a pity it would be if these big, honest-eyed, dusky men adopted all the white man's ways, and became drunkards, liars, cattle thieves, robbers!

"It would be a shame," he said aloud, "if this tribe became different from what they are today. The little booze they get now won't do them much harm. But the minute the white man gets in here and settles, well, the jug's up! I know—I've seen it happen!"

"Did you notice the shyness of the Indian women?" asked Underwood of his wife. "Well, that's some different from the Indian girls we saw up north,—at the rodeos and in the towns."

"Yes," answered Betty, "I noticed white men with them, too. Would they be married to the Indian women?"

In reply, Underwood explained that even though the Indian women were shy of white men, they often married them, or lived with them. He had met several trappers and traders, he said who had squaw wives, and that was easy to understand in most cases, as Indian women were exceptionally kind, sympathetic and unselfish. They worked hard, yet expected nothing in return.

Suddenly the jolting of the waggon increased, tipping their load from side to side. Chief Black Wing had said the trail would be rough,—hardly passable, especially with their waggon. Spreading

his arms wide, he had explained. "No wider this, in places—just moose path!" He had offered to send help along, but as the distance was less than three miles, Underwood had concluded that they could surely make it without help.

And here they were. It had been more than an hour since they had seen the last glimpse of flickering lights back in the Indian village, and heard the last sound of rumbling traffic along the distant Caribou highway. The trail had led into dense forest again. Indeed, the trail was not a trail,—just a moose path, as the Chief had said. Brush and tangled pea-vine, fallen trees, stumps, obstructed their way. Many times Buckshot was released from his line and hatched to trees across their path, which he dragged to one side.

Twice, short bridges had to be constructed, and again, the faithful saddle horse did his part in dragging poles, trees, brush and rock, to make the bridges strong enough for the passing of the waggon weight. Slowly the team moved forward on the last improvised bridge, mother and children having walked across, thus saving the load. Patiently, Underwood led his horses across by the light of the lantern held high in the hands of his wife. Finally the team reached the other shore of the creek. But all was not well. The horses' feet began to pull harder in the moist soil, and the wheels were struck solid. There was a snap. The waggon sagged to one side.

"Hell!" exclaimed Underwood. "Now what's happened?"

Taking the lantern, he knelt beneath the waggon.

"A broken axle!" he reported, as he crawled from beneath the waggon.

That was all he said, but his gentle wife knew by the expression on his face that his patience and courage were almost at an end.

Again, by lantern light, a strong, young birch was cut and an improvised axle made secure by removing a few feet of the waggon cover and rope, and the journey was continued, though much impeded by stumps and jagged rocks. The horses' legs were becoming sore and bleeding. Strips of soft blanket were bound around the wounded limbs, and another short distance traversed, over what might have sufficed for a pack-horse trail, but not a heavily loaded waggon.

Then, out of the darkness, the shadow of a low building loomed in a small clearing.

"Thank God!" cried Betty, with such fervour that it revealed the anxiety she had tried not to show, as she had comforted her children by telling them of the fun they would have gathering berries, taming squirrels and other little wild things that would be so numerous around their new home.

Through all these trying days and nights, if Underwood had loved his wife before, he certainly realized now his undying admiration for her strength of character, her loyalty and sacred trustworthiness.

Bringing his horses to a halt, Underwood got down and walked into the clearing and to the door of the building.

"It's a barn!" he called. "The road's good—drive in this way!" And Betty could see by the light of the lantern her husband swung towards her, that he had opened a wide door through which the waggon could pass.

The deserted and tumble-down barn might have

been a castle, as the weary travellers peered through the darkness and saw what it meant to them, - stacks of dry meadow hay for a bed,—shelter for the night!

CHAPTER

XI

The stars were still dimly agleam when, next morning Underwood was up and about, wandering into the forest at different points, seeking paths, if any, that would lead them to their valley. But there were no paths or trails, except the one that had brought them into the clearing, cutting across it, and straight on, west, where timber seemed to be larger and underbrush thicker and tougher.

In order to pass through at all, it was evident that the waggon would have to be made narrower, leaving part of the load behind in the barn, or the trail made wider so that the waggon might pass.

Backing the waggon from the barn, Underwood undertook the job of "narrowing" it with Betty's help. She held the boards as he sawed, and the task was accomplished by noon. Young Ray, who had helped with the unloading of the portion that

was to be left in the barn, now lent a hand at the reloading. The older horse was hatched to a newly made whuffle-tree, while the other horses were tied to follow behind. Leaving half their load in the barn, they finally pushed their way into the timber.

At first it was not too difficult to keep to the track by throwing off still more articles, such as chairs, a table, boxes and so on. Then the branches of huge trees dragged against the waggon top, rippling, tearing and lifting the now flapping cover with a ship-like motion, leaving strips of the canvas high in the trees. There were times when one end of the waggon would be high on a rutted track, while the other ran along on fairly level ground, though it bumped into stumps and rocks buried in undergrowth, shifting the load backward and forward as though on a high sea.

As the day wore on, the younger children for the first time, became fretful,—more so than in the mountains, when the drinking water had upset their stomachs and driven them to tears with abdominal cramps and pain. The parents, too, were at a loss for words and rode on in almost complete silence.

Though they had passed magnificent scenery on the long days and weeks of travel through all but trackless forests and plains, they were hardly prepared for the spectacle that broke before them, as suddenly they found that their road led them along the shore of a beautifully situated lake, with the sky afame with sunset colours reflected in the lake waters.

"Oh, look, Pop! . . . Oh, see that, Mum!" the children cried over and over again. They were

fascinated and thrilled at the jumping fish that caused ripples of beautiful colours. There was an abundance of wild flowers, some of them touched by the fall, their gay yellows and gold faded to rusty-brown, yet still retaining beauty. An occasional bush or tree carried what was left of the summer crop of wild fruit or berries. All these new and cheery things held their childish interest, inducing much argument as to how and when they could revisit the place to gather the fruits or catch the fish.

Making a sharp turn from the lake, which the horse seemed to follow instinctively, the trail led along the bank of a creek, filled with trout that fearlessly played about the bottom and against the grass along the shore, close to the wagon. There were numerous beaver dams which banked up the water, forming small lakes where water lilies would in spring spread their blossoms. In one of these, on the opposite shore, was a bull moose, standing knee deep, feeding on the tall meadow hay.

Neither were the partridge afraid. They seemed indifferent to these strangers who were about to enter their particular kingdom. Confidently, they sat on the willows that bounded the creek, so close to the wagon that Basil essayed to catch some of them for supper. Snapping his whip in their direction, two or three were captured and later enjoyed at their evening meal.

Not until young David had spied the cabin and called, "There 'tis! Look over there!" did the parents turn their gaze towards the nestling shambles of logs, cemented by mud and grass,—roofed by the same process—a board door barred across by a heavy log.

"Yes," said the mother, with a slight sigh, though her eyes were bright and sparkling by now, "That's it! We're home!"

"Mmmmm" was the only ejaculation that came from the father, as his keen eyes scanned the scene before him.

Thoughts rushed furiously through Underwood's mind,—thoughts of mingled thankfulness and dismay,—thankfulness that at last there was a roof to cover his family, and dismay that he had been responsible for bringing his loved ones, through so much hardship to such a mean abode.

Studying his features, Betty understood what was passing in her husband's mind. An understanding smile passed over her face as she leaned in her seat towards him, tucking her small hand in the crook of his arm.

"First impressions, you know, dear!" she said, laughingly. "I think it's beautiful here! . . . You just wait till I get the curtains up!"

In response her husband covered the small hand, giving the fingers a gentle squeeze of grateful love.

The waggon came to a halt by the cabin door. The path to the dwelling was overgrown with grass and weed. Brown squirrels scampered from the roof of dried mud to bending branches of trees, and scampered back again. Now and then a bird, disturbed in its sleep, uttered twitterings.

There might have been some dismay in the souls of the weary couple as they surveyed the roughness, the almost primitive aspect of their new home, but the external beauty that surrounded them seemed to compensate, for the time being, for everything else.

Lifting the loose log from its cleats, Underwood pulled on the rope which lifted the wooden latch, and the door swung open. Certainly the interior lacked all semblance of home. The heat of summer had cracked and loosened the thatch, permitting rain to seep in, causing the moss-plugged walls to rot, and harbouring many creeping things. The floors of the two dingy rooms were mud, hollowed out in many spots where the rain had dripped, first into puddles, then, drying out into deep holes. As the remaining light of day filtered through one dusty window draped by cobwebs and dried, dead fly wings, it fell upon a black, greasy lantern, hanging from a beam near a rusty sheet-iron stove.

Noticing there was still coal-oil in the lantern, Underwood proceeded to lift if possible, the decaying portion of the surroundings by lighting it. There was no doubt now that Old Tim had been driven to desperation when sickness came upon him. How a man could exist under such conditions, was a mystery to those proprie, whose humble prairie home now seemed palatial in comparison.

Tim had called this hovel a house for many years, yet his table was a rough uncomfortable packing box, and his chair four slats of a barrel held together by a nail here and there and by heavy strips of moose hide. The leaning stove was brown with rust, two covers warped, while the oven door was held in position by twisted rabbit wire. Where the few joints of dented and rusty stove-pipe wound up and passed through the crudely cut opening in the side wall, the clay had crumbled and fallen out, leaving more space for squirrels and other small animals and insects to enter. Behind the stove was a pile of stove wood, brush, an old pail used as a

"smoke," against flies and mosquitoes, and a broom, made by whittling the end of a fair sized stick into strips and tying them together.

On a dusty shelf were a few chipped and handleless cups and other dishes, stained from long use, strong tea, and lack of proper washing.

There was no door between the two rooms. In the back room, against the wall, were two roughly made bunks filled with hay and covered with dusty, soot-stained blankets. There were no pillows. Conveniences, such as dresser, chest, or commode, were lacking. In fact, there were no comforts at all, —not even a mirror in which a man might at least see himself grow old. Yet poor old Tim had lived, suffered, and almost died alone in such utter squalor!

After again glancing over the cabin, the old pots and pans hardly fit for the mixing of hen food,—the sleeping quarters,—the family decided that tonight at least, the waggon would be—a paradise!

* * * * *

There were steep mountains on two sides of their new home, and a lake at each end of the sprawling meadow. Over-ripe timothy and clover lay flattened to the earth where the horses had pranced and rolled when loosened from their sweaty harness the night before. The soft, blue-green creek, with its serpentine waters, cut the meadow in half. Far to the south and west of the cabin, Tim's land extended, yielding not only hay and pasture land but acres yet to be broken.

In Basil Underwood a sudden feeling of pity stirred for the man who had slaved to build out of

the virgin wilderness that spread in panoramic view before him. Now he fully realized what it would mean to get a start in the Caribou country. The mere cleaning and making habitable of the dilapidated cabin with its mud-soaked walls, would be an experience to be remembered. Later a new cabin would have to be constructed. Toil from sun up until all hours at night, would be imperative, and it would take every cent that could be racked up to buy necessary machinery and stock. The conditions of living with which he was now confronted, thought Underwood, were similar to those of the days when the first white man had left his foot-print on these western hills and plains.

Yet, just a forcibly, came the reflection "I must not think of failure now." This time, Basil Underwood, your foot-loose soul must calm itself!"

Tim had told him, he recollects, about the acres of timber land that ran far back into Timothy Mountain. There was the Mountain before him.

"Yeh'll have stove wood to last yeh a thousand years," Tim had said, but he might have added, as Underwood did now, when his eyes travelled over the tree tops and up the mountain slope, "and enough lumber to build a town!"

Land had been cheap when Tim had staked his homestead, --one hundred and sixty acres for less than the price of a good weasel pelt!

"Just the same," said Underwood aloud, as he considered the property that was now his, to improve or unpioneer, "I'm thinking Tim got the worst of the bargain."

But for the beauty of the view from the lone, front window of the cabin--an archway of willows shading a winding lane--the dreariness of the

interior would have oppressed the mother more. She worked unceasingly, from dawn to nightfall, to make the place habitable. Often her eyes were raised from her work to glance through the window at the stretch of browning meadow and at the slopes of the mountains.

"Perhaps, some day," she thought, "when this precious burden of mine is sleeping in his basket, I shall ride again, and be able to explore those mountain trails!"

It took seven trips with the strongest horse and one with the narrow cart, to gather the household goods strewn along the way—the longest trip being to the old barn, over the same formidable trails.

On the first trip out, not a great distance from the cabin, the shout of a man's voice startled both Underwood and his horse. Drawing up quickly, to catch more accurately the direction from which the call came, Underwood heard running steps coming down a side trail that was nothing more than a foot path. Turning in his saddle, Underwood saw a weird looking man, the upper part of the sun-browned body shirtless, his torn and sagging pants hanging in tatters, a strip of hide wound about his waist. His hair was almost shoulder length, matted and greasy. Two black, piercing and frightened eyes stared out from a long, hairy face. Had it not been for the tragedy in the gleaming eyes of the man, as he came to a stop beside him, Underwood might have laughed at the apparition he saw. But his innate kindness overcame the tendency to be amused by the Ripvan-winkle aspect of the stranger, who stood, panting and sweating, as though he had run for miles.

For a time it was difficult to ascertain the exact

meaning of the man's agitation, as he reached for Underwood's hand and grasped it in a pleading manner, while with the other hand he grabbed the bridle of the horse and turned it toward the one-man trail west of Underwood's intended destination. In his inarticulate and broken English, he tried to tell Underwood of some desperate happening back in the direction from which he had come.

Finally the situation became somewhat clearer. There was a partner somewhere, and he needed help. A heavy tree had fallen, pinning him beneath it. His companion had raced a full five miles for help. He and his companion were two lone trappers, living miles from the nearest village of any size. Neither of them had had an idea that help would be found inside those miles. The running man could not believe his ears when he had stopped to tie more securely the string in his worn-out moccasin and thought he detected the sound of horse's hoofs and the strong whistling of a man, he revealed haltingly.

For years on end these two primitive trappers had worked together, eked out an existence from forests and lakes.

"Staunch indeed!" thought Underwood, as the all but naked man, heedless of the brush and thorn scratches that tore at his flesh, darted this way and that, breaking stout branches, and yanking from the earth, with long, claw-like hands the obstructions that might hinder the quick passage of horse and rider.

"John, his good leg like deer!" the man had said, patting a birch tree trunk as he tried to explain that his companion had one wooden leg.

"Tree,—the on bad leg John, he much seck!"

From this, Basil gathered that John's good leg was the wooden one, and that the bad leg must be his real flesh and blood one,—the one pinned under the tree.

"What a tragic thing," thought Underwood, "to be trapped like that, with but the help of one crazed man!"

There came a shrieking call for help, dying out in a wordless moan. Over and over again, it came,—sometimes weaker, then again with renewed terror and force, though nearer. The man who called himself, "Pascal", dropped the bridle of the horse and ran on ahead, turning often to wave a direction and calling out to the injured man in his broken language, "Hao! Hao! John! . . . We come! We come!"

At last they reached a small clearing where newly-felled trees were in evidence. There, propped beneath a log, was the body of a man.

Hastily dismounting and following Pascal, Underwood noticed the clenched, livid lips of the prostrate man, the ashen face that showed above the whiskered chin.

His own throat went dry at the sight of the crushed leg, with bloody bones shoved straight up into the hip joint.

Underwood had encountered the victims of many accidents during his wanderings. He had in his make-up an inborn capacity for doing the right thing at the right time,—an inherent liking for the healing art of medicine that dated back to his earliest days when he had set the wounded leg of a pet Bantam hen. As a lad, he had made pills from cornmeal and starch—rolling them in sugar—and sold them for a few cents to his playmates, or

forced them down the throats of make-believe patients by holding their noses.

But here in this wilderness was a job to try the skill of the best surgeon.

"What shall I do?" was the question he asked himself. Then quickly the thought came to him. "Get your shirt off, and tear it into wide bandages! And undershirt too. What was the difference? Try and stop his bleeding, —if there's any blood left in him — for the earth around the body was blood-soaked, and it was clear that the removal of the tree weight would naturally result in fresh bleeding, and perhaps the death of the man. This was a chilling thought yet the tree must be moved! Taking the lasso from his saddle, Underwood hastily tied one end around the log. The other end was thrown over a heavy branch of a tree close by, and this was drawn down and tied to the saddle horn. Removing his shirts he tore them into several wide strips, then calling to Pascal, he gave instructions as to how he should withdraw the body as the log was raised by means of the hoisting rope.

Bending low over the injured man, who at times seemed to pass into unconsciousness, Underwood said gently, "Buck up now, master! Just a few minutes more!" And he gave the limp, cold hand that moved towards him a slight squeeze.

The man, John, slowly opened his eyes, looked for a second into the face of his liberator, and then closed them, turning away as if to say, "I'm ready, but why bother? One leg gone,—another soon will be. Why not let me die?"

With Pascal in position to swing the log as it was raised, Underwood spoke softly to his horse.

"Come on, Buckshot! *Easy, easy!* . . . That's the boy! Come on, now!"

Slowly the log moved upward as Buckshot bowed his head, then stepped forward in the direction of his master, straining as he moved until the saddle girth cut deep into his flesh and the clawing of his hoofs sent the soft earth flying in every direction.

"*Easy there, fellah!*" Underwood cried again, as Buckshot slowed with a jerk that sent the swinging log lower again, but now the suffering man had been withdrawn into a position of safety.

"Whoa! Whoa!" And the horse stood still until Underwood gave the command of, "Bock up!" The heavy swaying log came to earth with a thud.

The two anxious men on their cramped knees drew the injured body towards them. There was a low moan from the man, then he lapsed into unconsciousness. For this Underwood was grateful,—he felt he could work faster that way. Bandage after bandage was applied and the bleeding seemed to be retarded. Young saplings were cut and securely bound into a litter, which the two men worked frantically to make as comfortable as possible by placing to it dry moss, grass, and brush,—and finally, Underwood's coat was bound around the man's hip to ease the jar of movement.

While Pascal, jabbering in his incoherent way, was trying to console his partner, who still remained unconscious, Underwood caught in his face an expression of futility, as the ghastly face winced with pain, realizing, no doubt, as he must, the extent of his partner's injuries and the distance between him and proper care.

There he lay—the faithful friend of Pascal,

bruised and broken! What would life hold for the little Frenchman if help and surgical aid could not be obtained? As carefully as if they were trained stretcher bearers, Underwood and his helper carried John through several miles of rough trail and log roads to a spot where a passing truckman came to the rescue. The wounded man, on his stretcher, was placed on the truck, and in the long journey of near a hundred miles to the nearest hospital, Pascal knelt beside his partner, Basil learned after, taking the swaying and pounding of the truck against his own body, so that the sick man would not suffer being tossed from side to side of the fast moving vehicle.

* * * * *

It was early evening, two weeks later, when Underwood, hearing shouts and the clatter of cattle hoofs, turned to see a horseman crossing the creek bridge that led into the cabin. Beside him, lumbered a bawling cow led by a rope, and gambolling around its mother, was a calf clamoring for refreshment after its long run.

With a broad grin, Pascal swung down from his horse and stood, twisting the cow rope about his hand, as Underwood emerged from the cabin.

"T'ese for you, Mister Bass," he explained, with his characteristic gestures. "John, he say, des calf is for you . . . You keep cow for milk."

Waving towards the lighted cabin, where the face of young David was pressed against the window, he said, "He need milk. You keep cow for heem."

"You mean, these are for me?" exclaimed Underwood, in amazement.

"John, he say you good man." went on the Frenchman. "Hard get start in here, for family. We help."

"Thank you," answered Underwood. "You and John good men, too. We will help each other. I will pay for the cow." He made a move towards the cabin.

"No! no!" cried Pascal, catching the sleeve of Underwood's coat. "You good to John. No take money. You keep done!" And again the cow was pushed towards the barn, while Pascal stammered in his broken English, "The child need milk all winter."

Thus it was that Splinter, the adopted calf, so named because of his spindly legs, became the first Paradise Valley pet, and the beginning of a herd.

During his first encounter with Pascal, Underwood had tried to explain his location, and had told him that he and his family had come to the Caribou country to try a hand at homesteading,—and that Tim's place was the prize he had drawn. In turn, Pascal had related to his partner, John, the full details of the assistance given by Underwood during the trying ordeal at the time of the accident.

It was not exactly thankfulness that filled the heart of John when he learned that his leg could be saved. "It'll be as stiff as a poker," the doctor had said, "but better than 'two' tree stumps." Life had been hard indeed with one self-made limb. Two would have been a bit too much to call out the best in a man. However, gratitude he did feel for the kindness shown him by the white stranger. John could recall the gentleness of his

hands when he bound the broken bones, and the tone of his voice as he said, "Buck up, master!" The memory of these kindnesses lingered in the pain-dulled mind long after the leg had been given attention and the unkempt body made clean and comfortable.

He had listened with interest to the stories Pascal had related about the Underwoods,—the almost circus trained pony that moved at the slightest word or nod from his master,—the household trappings left along the trails for miles back, having to be brought in by a pack-horse or on the back of the new settler (whose name remained in Pascal's mind only as 'Mister Bass').

But by bit Pascal had told him all he knew about the stranger including his occupation of the tumble-down shack of old Tim.

It was tough enough for men to stake claim in a wilderness, thought John, whose sympathetic and honest heart could feel for the smallest wild animal and its young. For a woman, like the wife of this stranger, and her children, why it was pitiless and inhuman!

"Give him the new milk cow!" John had ordered, "and the calf. The children need milk. Help this Mister Bass cut trees for new cabin. Tim's shack no good for woman and kids. Take Indian to help."

Pascal had followed John's instructions thoroughly, and Underwood was appreciative of the assistance given him as he noted the progress of the new cabin with its white, shining interior, bunks, cupboards and floors. Small though it was,—three rooms and a kitchen—it was home, nevertheless,—

and it was ready for occupancy none too soon, as the cold weather was now well upon them.

It was late November. Jock, the Indian helper, with his quick eye for weather signs, revealed in the habits and calls of birds, had warned, "November moon is the hunters' moon—The last week the Indian summer." Time was indeed short for the cutting of cedar logs, splitting by hand the chock-blocks for roofing the cabin and out-houses.

The days had been calm and still, save for the rustling of trees, the chirrup of birds, the chatter of squirrels that stood on their hind legs, nibbling and blinking at the strangers, as if to say, "Who are you? Why have you come, ripping and tearing at Tim's Paradise?"—We don't like this noise of saw and axe . . ."

The solitude of the prairie,—big, open and bleak, —had been fearful. Here was bigness, too, but not the awful emptiness of the prairie. Here was the song of the birds,—friendly animals and friendly man. And here was a gentle woman who could withstand the summer's heat and the winter's bitter cold, that her man and children might have food, homey comfort and care—and love.

CHAPTER XII

Those were unforgettable years, —those four years spent in Tim's valley. They were filled with hardships, drama, and tears. Yet through it all there ran the sound of laughter, weak at times, though ever youthful in its expression of indomitable spirits. Far from the tumult and confusion of the world,—so situated that “they needs must be their own best company,”—this pioneer couple struggled through what many people would have called, “a thousand hells.”

Poor in possession of worldly goods and money,—for much had to be spent in gathering together the necessities of life,—they were rich in wisdom and courage,—wisdom that sprang from the depths of their inner selves,—courage born from a keen

and intense love of life. These were the qualities that enriched them.

There were times when Underwood felt a return of the old restlessness, but he found that by a temporary change, such as a walk by the lake or the catching of some fresh fish for dinner, he could overcome this mood. Well did he remember the benediction that had come to him and his wife on their first night in their new home, four years ago. They had taken a walk to the lake edge, and a glow had filled their hearts as the still faintly-tinted sunset had cast its rainbow reflections. The old wormes of depression and restlessness had faded like a mirage, leaving in them a refreshed desire to make good in the face of every discouragement.

It was on that night, while listening to the new night sounds, that Underwood had heared the snapping of twigs directly behind him. Having his flash-light with him, he had turned its beam into the wood.

Suddenly there had been a rush, and almost across their path had darted a young buck, springing over rocks to the trail and off into the bush again.

"Holy smoke!" Underwood had exclaimed. "Did you see that fellah? We need him." And Underwood—who was carrying his rifle—had taken quick aim.

Bang had gone the shot. There had been a scramble,—the sound of tearing bush. Picking their way cautiously towards the spot from which these sounds had come, the flashlight had shown Underwood that the deer had fallen, but had raised itself and gone on. There was blood on the foot path where he had fallen. Stepping along in the underbrush a short way, following the blood

spotted earth, the deer was again sighted,—this time stretched and panting across the path.

Underwood hated killing, had always hated it. He had taught his sons that all things had a right to the life given them, and that they must not kill, except for the maintenance of life or preservation of life in self defence. His words of advice had come back to him, as the painfully timid eyes of the dying deer had gleamed for a second in the beam of the flashlight.

"Hate to do this, fellah!" Underwood had said, "but I just have to." And a second shot had rung through the stillness of the night.

That had been their first meat. Much of it had been salted down for the winter. One quarter had been traded for a sack of flour, five pounds of lard and a jar of peanut butter. The family had rejoiced when provisions were brought home and had enjoyed the fun of unpacking the saddle bags.

How the little mother had laughed when her husband had said, "See what I bought for us! . . . Cost all of twenty-seven cents—extra," as he had placed a small package of rifle shells on the kitchen table.

During the first week of their life in the valley, the children had found a sheltered nook by the creek edge blocked with fish. Rushing to the cabin they had secured a sack, and with their bare hands had actually scooped the fish from the water. These, too, had been salted and smoked for the winter supply,—the smoking process having been taught young Ray by the Indian helper, Jockum.

Moose meat had also been a plentiful and life-saving commodity that first winter. Just before the first big snow, while staking land for spring

sheep grazing back in the mountain, Underwood had sighted eight moose in one afternoon and had shot two of them. With the help of two friendly trappers, who had heard the shots, the carcasses had been dragged by hand for two miles to a place to which a team could be brought to pull them home.

Not all the winter supply of food had been due to Underwood's 30-30 Winchester. It had been bitter cold, but the moon was riding high on that November evening of their first winter, the children settled in bed when Betty had decided to take her own rifle along on a short stroll with her husband across the creek, - the one open road of their adopted valley. Not more than ten minutes from the cabin three deer had stood together, their shadows silhouetted on the light fall of glistering snow, their pointed ears cocked high. Taking aim, Betty had fired. Off had gone the deer deep into bush, - all but one. This meat had been traded for eggs, butter, and hay.

Peace in "Deer Land" had reigned so long since Tim had started the silence with his shots, that the perky animals seemed plentiful and not afraid. It was a common sight to look from the cabin window and see two or three deer, scampering like rabbits, at the edge of the clearing. And to see a lumbering bear sniffing about the wood pile or out-buildings, had not been unusual. One very large fellow had been shot as he nosed against the cross-bar of the barn door where the horses resented his desire to taste their warm blood. In this case, his long shaggy coat became the choice rug for the cabin sitting room.

The Underwoods had hoped to occupy their

new cabin for their first Christmas, but the building of it had been slowed down by the early coming of a heavy fall of snow. This had made the shoveling of paths necessary, and Jockum, had not been able to get through the drifts to help them as often as he had done. Thus Tim's old home had been the scene of their first Christmas in Paradise Valley.

Since they were tiny tots, a special box had always come to the children from their favourite aunt in the East, who always contrived that, being so far away, this aunt of the family was especially remembered.

"Would the box arrive this Christmas?" had been the anxious thought of each child, as he or she watched for some caller from the nearest post office who might weather the storm and bring the package,—as had happened several times back in the prairies.

The old floors of Tim's cabin had been filled in, levelled and covered with fresh boards from a partly built chicken house. Cupboards, shelves and tables made for the new cabin had been set up for temporary use. Curtains decorated the windows and the atmosphere was homey, pleasant and expectant, though the children had learned that happiness is found in simplicity.

Eight miles south of the valley, lived the first white woman neighbour and her little son. Her husband was seldom home, as his trapping took him far into the mountains where he and his partner lived during most of the year, to be near the trading posts.

The Underwoods had met this woman as she had passed by the creek road on her way to the mail,—on horseback holding her child in front of

her on the saddle,—for a round trip of twenty-eight miles. They had made friends with her, and they had hoped that, weather permitting, she would spend Christmas with them. But when the snow came, blocking all paths, they realized that this pleasure would have to be denied them.

But Pascal had not forgotten the Underwoods. His old partner, John, could not read or write, but this did not prevent him from giving orders from the hospital to Pascal to do this or that, in hieroglyphics that Pascal, in turn rushed down to the valley to have deciphered.

It was late afternoon on the day before Christmas when Pascal was seen sliding along on his snow shoes towards the bridge.

Over his back was slung a heavy package, under one arm was another, while his free arm was waving a characteristic salute.

What joy shone in the faces of all. The children rushed to Pascal's side and began to unload him. Underwood and his wife stood in the open door with smiles mingled with tears, as Betty said softly, "Darling—it's going to be nice, isn't it? Sarr never forgets us! Bless their hearts—I was beginning to be afraid it wouldn't get through. And it means so much to the children, this year!" Then, "Look!" she cried excitedly,—holding up an envelope Pascal had handed her,—"a letter from Tim . . ."

"See my new suit, Mum!" had called David, happily holding up a small brown suit of wool and a white blouse with decorated collar and pocket with a jumper coat attached. Then, as he drew the tiny handkerchief from the pocket of the blouse,

his eyes had beamed. "See! See!—a silver cent" he shouted, as a twenty-five cent piece was displayed in the palm of his chubby hand.

Fancy package after package had been carefully unwrapped, the paper folded and the ribbon rolled neatly beside it, while each child laughed, patted and hugged their gifts. There had been toys, mittens in gay colours, with tassels at the wrists, stockings, bed socks, warm pajamas with blue and pink stripes, Christmas candies, nuts, raisins and figs, and a package for the new baby expected in March. There had been new fluffy curtains for the cabin windows, and pot holders with scenes on them,—so pretty that young Jean had been fascinated by them, proceeding at once to tack them on the sitting room wall.

Underwood had watched the expression of Pascal's face as the festivities increased and subsided,—an expression that seemed to say, "anything for me?"

Going quietly to the kitchen, Underwood had taken a pair of his own Christmas socks, tied them in fancy paper and sneaked them back on the Christmas tree. Then he had said, innocently, "I saw a package there somewhere for Pascal. Where is it?" Pascal had only stared. Getting up from the couch, he'd crossed to where David held out the package. He had swallowed a few times, and with hands that trembled with excitement, opened the package.

"By God!" he half mumbled. "Dese mine?"

"Yes," replied Underwood, "you didn't think Santa would forget a good guy like you, did you?" And he gave Pascal's long nose a slight twist.

So that first Christmas had been a happy one.

in face of all its hardships. The battery radio had given them song and music. Moose, squirrel, even porcupine, were tried out in pot pie. But roast moose was the outstanding meal.

* * * * *

March drew near. Arrangements had been made for "Big Basket," an Indian girl from the mission to come to the Underwoods for domestic work and to care for the family while the mother was in hospital. The hospital selected for her confinement was a large one, eighty miles away. As her time drew nearer, Basil had decided to start on the trip before the first big thaw, which might make travel impossible.

All had been well for the first fifty miles over the jolting trails. Then Betty had felt the need of care. Husband and wife were travelling in a small, borrowed truck, the only available means of conveyance. As Betty's sickness continued and her pains became more acute, a smaller hospital was sought,—and just two hours after her admission to it, a bouncing baby boy was delivered unto his mother's arms.

During the absence of the mother from the home, Big Basket had won a place in the hearts of the family, though she was shy and quiet at first, and slow to speak. Though her language was Chinook, she spoke good English, with occasional touches of French and German accents, due to her training at the mission where the teachers were French and German priests. She was an only child, and like all Indian children, was much beloved by her parents. She had been at the mission

eight years and amused the children by stories of her life there,—how she had been very lonely for her parents the first year or two and had run away,—how the priests had found her and beaten her with large black whips of moose hide. Her parents, she said, had not eaten for two days after that,—so after, she had stayed at school and given no more trouble.

She had large brown eyes—the usual eye of the Indian—raven black hair, which at first she kept in a fancy silk kerchief until shown by Jean how the Crees of the prairies wore their hair in two long braids. Despairfully, Big Basket had looked at the picture of the prairie Indian girl, but the following day she had appeared with her hair in two braids which reached her waist in front.

Big Basket's kindness to the children soon dispelled the feeling of loneliness they had at first experienced during the absence of their mother. Upon her return, Betty found son David often clasping the hand of the Indian girl and calling her, "Mum." He was proud to lead her to the newly-made crib that smelled of wild hay and pine, and to point towards the tiny round, pink face and say, "My brodder 'he's all mine'."

Though the Indians usually guard their tanning secrets jealously,—even with their lives,—Basket was eager to show what she had learned of such work and the making of moccasins, gloves, coats and fancy bead work. Her own deer skin moccasins were a work of art. As she had learned to sew, her clothes, too, were neatly made. There was no doubt of her usefulness to the Underwoods when later she revealed her knowledge in the washing, carding and spinning of sheep's wool, with

which the entire family was clothed in stockings, mittens, sweaters and underwear. The wool was utilized also in the weaving of their blankets.

*

CHAPTER

XIII

Underwood straightened himself. He had been examining intently what appeared to be the prints of bare feet in the snow. But it was still cold and snow was deep in the wooded sections where many trap-lines ran.

"It couldn't possibly be a man's foot!" he exclaimed, stooping to scan again the impression in the snow that led around a brush pile and off towards a thickly wooded forest.

"Yes, I'll be darned if it isn't a man's foot print!" he cried suddenly,—and he followed in the direction of the marks.

As he neared the edge of the thicket, there was a sound of snapping twigs and the crunching of crusted snow. Not feeling quite certain whether such noises were from man or beast, Underwood

cocked his gun and stood waiting. Presently there was a new movement,—that of the slow bending of a branch. Underwood stood motionless, his eyes glued to the spot where he believed eyes of some description were gazing back at him. Suddenly the branch flew upward, and there was a movement of feet in the opposite direction.

Following closely, Underwood discovered that not only were there foot-prints in the snow, but imprints of two hands. Only one conclusion could be drawn. Here was a man travelling on all fours. And sure enough, off in a small clearing, not more than twenty feet away, was a figure of a crouching man. Sometimes it remained in a half-stooped position, and then it jumped, with both hands sinking the earth, from drift to drift, over fallen trees and brush. Often, between his jumps, the man would pause and glance quickly in the direction from which he had come, a look of terror in his wild, deep-set eyes.

Deer skins draped his body. He had long, black hair, gray across the front, matted and neglected. His broad, drooping lips quivered and twisted as he turned to view his pursuer.

Beside a wood and brush pile a shack stood. Towards this the man rushed, pushed open the door, entered and slammed the door behind him.

"Hello, there!" called Underwood, not much expecting that the frightened creature of a man would answer him. "I say, hello! . . . I didn't mean to scare you. Come on out!"

Silence was the only reply. Then as Underwood glanced towards the foot square window what was broken and stuffed with grass, he saw

the upper part of the man's face, for a fleeting moment.

Again Underwood spoke. "Come on!—I'm not going to hurt you. I'm sorry I almost shot you!—I thought you were a deer!"

Then he waited, and presently there was a slight movement of the door.

"I'm your new neighbour," called Underwood. Then the thought suddenly struck him,—What if the man had a gun? Quickly he turned to leave the place, looking back cautiously that he might dodge any possible shot.

Then he saw that the door of the shack was partly open, and standing at it, was a wild-eyed man, clutching a heavy stick in his hairy hand.

Underwood waved his free hand, shouting, "Hello!—See you again some time!" and passed out of sight. Several different incidents kept him from making a return visit for many weeks.

Sprig came, with its warm winds, its wild flowers and budding trees. Later there was the rich growth of peacock and vetch, growing as high as the horses' knees. On the mountain slope the children had found the choicer berry patches,—huckleberries, blueberries, raspberries and quantities of wild strawberries. Often, when their pails and baskets were filled, they stripped bark from the trees and made new baskets. Underwood had told his children of his encounter with 'the wild man', as he called him, and had described his shack. He had, however, warned them not to venture in that direction alone, — at least to keep within call of a farmer or trapper when he or their mother could not be with them. This, however, did not keep the wild man from tracing the steps of his

retreating taller before the snow had melted and peering through the trees like a scared animal to the cabin where the children were playing.

Ray was the first to catch a glimpse of the man, as he crouched on his hands in a springing position.

"Hello!" the boy called, remembering his father had warned him not to 'act afraid', should he ever meet the man.

There was no answer, though the man did not move.

Ray walked closer and said again, "Hello, mister! . . . We won't hurt you. Come on out!"

Slowly the man raised himself to full height, and stood within ten feet of the boy, still gazing intently, his hands rubbing and scratching his bearded face.

"What's your name?" questioned Ray, showing curiosity.

The man's lips moved, but no sound came.

"My Pop wants to help you," continued the boy. Then, taking a few steps nearer, he smiled, and held up a rabbit by the ears,—a rabbit he had found snared by the foot and had brought home and nursed back to health.

Suddenly the man showed interest. A half smile curled his weather-beaten lips,—but it soon vanished as young Ray tried to pass the rabbit into his hands. Like a scared deer, he turned and darted through the woods.

The tragedy of this man's life was later told to the Underwoods by the Indians. His name was Paul Blaze. He was either a Dane or a German,—no one seemed to know exactly which. He had appeared to be a powerfully built man when first the Indians found him.

That was shortly after he had hidden himself, as he thought, from the world. He spoke German and French fluently, and was apparently well educated, in the estimation of mission-trained Indians. He was also an expert in fancy pastry and had worked in pastry shops in Montreal.

It was not from Montreal, however, that the big Dane had come at the time he met the Canane Lake settlers. He had been a refugee from justice, hunted by the police. He had been on a boat,—so he had told Chief Black Wing in one of his confidential moments. Never having been in solitude before, it was a tragic experience to find himself alone, lost in a dense forest that stretched between hundreds of miles of mountain ranges, inhabited by wild animals, and nothing but his two bare hands with which to eke out an existence. He had no gun, nor snares or traps, and knew nothing about ways of catching animals, birds or fish. All through one summer he lived on wild berries.

From watching bears claw squirming ants from tree trunks and eating them, the thought had come to him that these might be edible for a human being, so he had copied their method and ate these insects by the thousands during the winter. In fact, what ever the bears ate, he ate. Then the Indians had found him. They were fishing, and learning of the man's hunger, had given him hooks and a line. Later, an Indian loaned him a rifle and a few shells. With these he had shot a moose which the Indians had taught him to cure and smoke for winter use. They had helped him to build a small cabin and a few traps, showing him how and where to set them. He had met a few trappers who had helped him when the second

winter came around,—helping him to build traps and assisting him with the bringing in of his catch. The Indians had never let him down, often taking supplies to his cabin, until finally he had mastered the art of living in the wilds. But solitude, with only wild animals as close companions, does something to a man, especially when he lives in fear of the law. It had done something to Paul Blaze.

As Paul came to know a few of the white settlers, he'd began to trust them, especially Underwood. But it took Basie many months to win this confidence. Underwood had been four years in the valley before he was willingly admitted to Paul's cabin. And what a cabin! Dirt floor, dirt roof, a block of wood his only chair. There was no cook stove,—only an old, dented, rusty heater that had survived a shack fire. There were no conveniences for baking, except a twisted frying-pan. In that, bannock was mixed, and the pan was then leaned against the side of the heater to cook it. On one occasion when Underwood called during this process, Paul had asked him to stay and share the meal. This Underwood did in a kindly mood, but the bannock had not been properly cooked and had to be eaten partly raw, by means of spoons whittled from wood.

But the ugliness and misery of the life Paul had lived had had its effect on him mentally, though at times, when in the friendly atmosphere that Underwood created about him, he seemed to become quite normal. But beyond the wearing of half decent clothes again, and accepting and eating properly cooked food, he never wholly recovered.

Sometimes, in Underwood's company, he would carry on short conversations with his new-found

friend. On one particular evening when the two men were seated beside a campfire a few miles from home, Underwood, who liked poetry and often recited it, began to quote Omar Khayyam's, "A jug of wine, a loaf of bread . . ." To his surprise, the low, trembling voice of Paul broke in with "—And thou beside me, in the wilderness."

It was difficult to believe that this man — this cowering scarecrow with his ravaged face and frightened eyes, could once have been anything worthwhile in a world of light, song and poetry. But so it was, — and until he became quite irresponsible and a danger to those who came in contact with him, he was cared for by his friendly neighbours. When the time came, however, that he was no more responsible for his acts, the police were notified and he was taken away, not as Paul Blaze the hunted man, but as an aged and crazed man, who had no memory of other days, or fear of justice, whatever his crime might have been.

Underwood could remember many trying experiences in his life on the prairies, but he faced new ones in his years in Paradise Valley. To harrow acres and acres of land by dragging a tree, in lieu of a plough, from sunset to dusk, was certainly an ordeal to which he was not accustomed.

There were no farm tools at Tim's when Basil took over and in order to earn enough money to buy them, Underwood had realized that he must grow more produce, which he had little time to do. The alternative was to borrow tools from a neighbour, but this meant the performance of some friendly act in return, such as the digging of holes of post holes, the building of fences, and so on,— and again the problem was to find time.

Then came the loss of his horns after they had eaten some poisonous weed. The replacing of them took the proceeds from the sale of two cows, reducing the family's supply of milk and butter, and leaving none to be sold.

The rising moisture from the meadow, too, played havoc with Basil, causing a serious sinus condition, so that he knew he must, sooner or later, get medical advice. Another worry was the continued intestinal disturbance suffered by young Ray, who had never completely recovered from the effects of the long trip through the mountains that the family had endured after leaving the prairie. During his first three years in the valley, he had not been able to stand horse-back riding to and from school, a distance of seventeen miles. Finally he had to be sent to the hospital, miles from home, for treatment. This had necessitated the use of the boy's savings of forty dollars, secured by him through the sale of squirrel pelts at twenty-five cents a pelt, and the proceeds of the sale of the summer crop of cabbages. When the doctor's bill came in, although he had agreed to take any balance due him in vegetables, there remained barely enough to cover the amount due for medical services. Then it had been necessary to sell two new quilts and blankets, — blankets Betty had woven after carding and spinning the wool from their own sheep.

After Ray's return however, his happy face, though pinched and white, had brought joy to the family, and for a time serenity reigned in and about the cabin. Having brother Ray back, made all the difference in their little world.

It was at the beginning of the fifth year that a

little thing like a toothache became a disturbing element. The grinding ache of a molar disturbed Jean's nights and spoiled the pleasures of her day. Everything from painting with iodine to packing with a tobacco leaf, Jock's suggested remedy, was tried, with no effect, except for the nausea resulting from the tobacco juice. Dental care had to be sought, and to secure it, another trip to the largest town, many miles away, became necessary. Well it was that this time Betty travelled along with her little daughter and that her comforting arms were available when it was learned that the tooth was not all her trouble.

"Bad tonics," diagnosed the dentist, after extracting the tooth. So it was arranged that Jean should enter the hospital. Betty returned home most of the way by car, and was met by her husband, when nearly home. Instructions had been left at the hospital for Jean to be sent down by stage in four days time.

Fortunately, squirrel pelts still rated a fair price. The shooting, too, of a couple of large moose, which were exchanged for fall hay, helped the family to conserve the small amount of cash they had on hand,—otherwise, the new hospital bill would have been a year-long worry. But the Underwoods never neglected their obligations, big or small, regardless of the inconvenience to themselves. For this they were well rewarded in respect and friendship, especially by the Indians, who always gave more than they were paid for when dealing with the owner of Paradise Valley.

Basil had extended his clearing of land deep into the forest. His vegetable gardens thrived well and brought fair prices,—or the products were

bartered for other goods. But winters were extremely cold, and this made the preservation of vegetables difficult, as they had no frost-proof cellar. The family now found their cabin too small, and the vision of a larger home often came to Underwood. The coming of another child entered into the picture, too. Little Donald, who was called Buckskin by the Indians, was nearing his fourth year, and ever since he had been able to murmur his first prayers, he had asked God to send him a little sister. The father, too, had expressed a desire for a little playmate for his youngest son,—some one to romp and tumble with besides a dog, a kitten or rabbit.

Across the lake from the Indian ranches, just twenty-six miles from Paradise Valley, were ten thousand acres of good land. The price for filing a claim in that area, was the usual two dollars per one hundred and sixty acres. Settlers were few but they were white, and there was a school within two miles. Even if he lost out on the sale or exchange of his farm, Underwood thought that a move there would be worth while. Though several of the settlers there depended upon trapping and hunting for a living, there were two or three who had fine gardens of tomatoes, corn, cucumbers and apples,—none of which grew successfully in his valley.

There was an empty cabin there, and he could get it cheap, so he learned,—on small monthly payments. The owner had become discouraged and lonely, and had gone back to Toronto. The cabin was large, it had five rooms, including a small kitchen. Attached to it were well made farm buildings and large chicken houses.

"Surely, we'd be better off over there by the lake," Basil said to his wife. "We'd be nearer the school, the post office and a store. That would be an improvement."

Betty did not answer immediately, but stood looking down the lane through the archway of trees to the creek bridge. There was a look of wonder and apprehension in her eyes, though it vanished as quickly as it came.

Turning to her husband, she said, "Oh, those itching feet of yours, those feet of Abraham! How I wish I could help you this time Basil dear, but you know I expect to be in the hospital any day now."

CHAPTER

XIV

The early spring of the new year brought many changes.

Underwood had been fortunate in securing a fair price for his valley property, enough at least, to purchase the lake home he had been considering. The future outlook seemed promising, both in regards to health as well as comfort.

Betty's heartstrings were stretched again, but valiantly she moved along beside her husband, without demur.

It was four weeks later. With the help of Indians outside, and Basket, inside,—when she was not attending to her new trap lines,—the lake home had become established.

The many daily tasks had been finished and the home was quieting down for the night. From the kitchen came the huss and hum of the kettle

on the side of the stove, the snoring of Rex, the pup David had brought home from school with a sore paw, and the crackle of the fire as it blazed from the dry balsam on the chips.

These were homey sounds that Betty had missed during her stay in the hospital where the rattle of dishes, ether carts and bed-pans had often awakened her in the dead of night.

Beside her in their sitting room was her husband, sleeping after a hard day of hauling many loads of hay for a neighbour—one of the few white ranchers—who gave him in return, oats for his horses.

"Poor dear!" thought Betty, as she watched his face relax and heard the soft breathing become deeper as he slept.

Betty was writing a letter to Sarr, down East. This had been her first chance to thank Sarr for the box of lovely baby things that had arrived the day she had left for hospital. Many nice boxes had arrived to delight the family through the years. About the lake-home sittingroom, there were numerous indications of the city aunt's devotion to her relatives,—pictures she had painted, sea-shell ornaments, and trinkets that would especially appeal to inland children,—all were there, carefully preserved and cherished.

In her letter Betty wrote: "We have all been very busy getting settled in another house. I got back from hospital in time to do some of the light packing, though Basil and the boys did mostly everything . . .

"They were all so pleased that I brought home a little sister. We have called her Mary. She is a dear baby, has big, blue eyes and a tiny nose,—

Basil says, like yours! Don calls her, "Little Wing." Hope the chief won't object!"

"I like our new home very much. We have more room and Basil won't have to sleep on the floor any more. It must be very pretty here in spring when the trees are in leaf. I know we will feel better with more fruit to eat, and apples grow very near us.

"Basil caught a black Siberian timber wolf and a wild-cat last month. You should see the skins here on our floor! They are real pretty as mats, and warm.

"David occasionally slips and calls you his Pirate aunt. He is quite a boy now but I spank him, big as he is, and have told him in future to say, "Auntie Santa Claus," because that was more suitable. That is the way I feel. We all love you, though we have yet to meet."

"We have managed to get through the heavy part of the winter fairly well. Very little cold weather and little snow. We felt very badly when Grandmother Underwood died, but we are glad Grandad went East to be near his people. He will be happier than he would have been out here. The things he sent out to us finally arrived and they make our home so much cozier. My kitchen is quite attractive now,—oilcloth on the floor, quite a few nice dishes and some new linen,—of course, you know who sent that!"

"My mother often asks after you in her letters. She still lives near Kamloops and even at her age, does some writing.

"Foolish of me I know, but I sometimes wonder—even so soon—how long we will be here, knowing my Basil as I do. He worries about me! You see,

there are so few white women here. Many of the trappers have married Indian women. They seem happy enough, but that's not everything! One trapper near us has been married to an Indian woman for twenty-seven years. At the beginning of the First War, the government officials tried to catch him and push him into the army, they say, but they could not find him in these woods. Another trapper was married to an Indian woman for several years, but she died. Now he has a white wife. I've never been in any of their homes, but Basil says they get along well. I can't imagine it!"

"Baby Mary is beginning to fuss and is chewing her fists. I think I better nurse her and get to bed myself."

"Thank you so much for everything. The children asked me to thank you for the toilet articles. They are difficult to get here."

* * * * *

Betty had finished her letter, but she decided to add a postscript.

"You asked what we do about screen doors in summer," she wrote. "Up until now we have had to copy the Indians and use a "smoke" in an old bucket for days and part of the night. Not pleasant, I know, but we had to do it. The mosquitoes are very thick,—really worse than the prairie flies, if that's possible."

The Underwoods were to spend five years on this lake property. As in their Valley home, there were many happy times, but some of the children were old enough now to feel responsibility, to appreciate the meaning of life, to suffer when their

parents suffered, and began to be a real help in the home and on the farm.

Resulting from Underwood's trips to the traders and the post office, strong friendships with some of the finer Indians sprang up. The old Chief himself often spoke with him, telling of his hunting days, speaking in his pigeon English, as he had learned it in the course of trading with French Columbia Chinamen.

"Me catchum, heap big Mowitch," Chief Black Wing had said when explaining he had shot a very large deer. He was a powerful man amongst his people, and his squaw, Klootch, was liked and respected by the Indians and white men alike.

Grinning and pointing to David, who had accompanied his dad on one of his trips, Klootch said, "Hum hi-yus hootum papoose" meaning, "he is a big strong baby." But David was quite a big boy to be considered a baby and resented the remark, saying, "What does she think I am?"

Underwood was beginning to see that the lives these "Children of the Forest" lived, were almost devoid of worry. They laughed and played as they worked, prankish, though ever kindly in their practical jokes. They loved music and played the violin and guitar with gusto and feeling. Many of them had good singing voices, soft and low. Underwood liked to sing and when with these men he and they indulged in many a sing-song.

To the mind of this white man, these Redskins were not just untamed savages, fifty years removed from the stone age because of their way of living. They had proved their right to the friendship of the white settlers who treated them as brothers, and they never forgot a kindness.

In giving information about their methods of trap making and setting, they would omit to mention the particular sets for lynx and mink, as they had found from experience that white men were apt to take possession of their property. But Underwood found no difficulty—a bit later—in winning their confidence, and he respected it. Thus he derived great benefit from his contact with the Indians and from the information they gave him.

The absent faces of Jockum, Pascal and John were never forgotten, and the occasional glimpse Underwood had of them—either at a trading post or on hunting trips—reminded him of pleasant times they had had together.

Spring came, bringing with them warmth and green things and a feeling of renewed life. Summers brought their heat, with a dryness that seemed to improve the health of the Underwoods, who had suffered continually with colds from the meadow dampness at Paradise Valley. By the end of the second fall, their crops had increased and living had been more encouraging, though prices for pelts had dropped badly.

The long days of hauling hay for the other farms, leaving the care of calves, chickens, milking of cows and most of the chores to his wife, made Underwood feel at times, however, that the change had not been too beneficial, after all. Yet he realized that he had, to a considerable extent, cured himself of the old restlessness which had sometimes caused so much discomfort to his family. The cutting through of a new trail on his property to a smaller lake deeper in the forest, had been undertaken by him, when time was available, to

divert his energies and prevent him from attempting to wander farther afield.

Even with all the home cares, there were happy times when Betty would load her children on her horse,—one in front and two behind, fasten the ice cream freezer over the saddle horn and start out for that part of the country where her husband was working. On such occasions, Underwood often heard the singing of his wife and children long before they came into view,—their sweet voices raised in, "I've a comin'," or some other homesy song. Then they would gather strawberries or raspberries, and with the ice that had been cut and stored near their secluded lake, make ice cream in the freezer, enjoying it under the shade of the trees.

Betty, too, recognized the weariness in her husband's eyes, the look that always told her of his restlessness. And she realized that, as time went on, his health was not as good as she had hoped it would be. Sometimes that worried her far more than she dared to acknowledge. These little visits with the children helped to brighten his days, as he worked laboriously,—too often quite alone, with no sound but the lowing of the wind and his own occasional whistling.

"I tracked a moose all day today," wrote Basil to his dad, now finally settled in the East, "up one side of a mountain across a rock-slide, through a swamp and over hundreds of acres of fallen trees that had been fire kindled and blown down by a high wind we had last fall."

"Sometimes I was close to him, but he always managed to keep just out of sight. I wanted very much to get him, as I can't have our winter's meat

before I go into hospital for an appendix operation, which the doctor tells me should not be put off until another attack.

"But I got very tired and it began to get dark, so I started for home. It is hard to describe just how a hunter feels about that time. First you realize you are in a strange part of the mountains you never saw before. Your clothes are wet and heavy with snow-water. Then your rifle begins to feel heavier than before and you can hardly climb over the tangle of fallen timber which is slippery with snow and ice. And to make matters worse, as darkness finally sets in, the slippery rocks and logs you jumped over in daylight, you stumble against now, and often fall, barking your shins and elbows. Believe me, dad, when finally—nearing midnight—the light of the cabin shines through the trees and you know someone is waiting there, - well I wouldn't trade what I have for any thing in the world!"

"This was my first trip with so little success. Maybe I shall do better next time."

"Since I wrote last, the squirrel market has disappeared. This means nothing much to sell this winter."

So the letter ran . . .

The following week brought better luck, for Basil shot a moose and deer not more than a mile from home. By lantern light, Betty helped her husband pack the meat, though a neighbour, who needed help, was given a good supply of it.

"He needs it more than we do," was Underwood's quick decision, as husband and wife passed a sick trapper's cabin. Part of the meat was sold

for twenty dollars worth of groceries, making in all a satisfactory day.

Though the winters were not as fierce and bleak as on the prairies, there were often sweeping storms that kept the children from school. This did not dampen their energies or desire to study, however. They always enjoyed the making of moccasins, gloves, caps, and helping with the carding and spinning of the wool for their clothing and blankets.

By this time, Basket had found a new job. She had married a fine, hard-working Indian trapper and had a little son whom she had named after herself,—regardless of sex,—“Wee Basket.”

In the Underwood home there was a new Indian girl helper, Madge Like Basket, she had spent years at the Mission and was well trained in her domestic duties, neat and clean, and a good cook and seamstress. She was generous and kind. If, as seldom happened, there was a shortage in desert, Madge would insist on passing her share to the children.

Then an epidemic struck the settlement. The cause of it no one knew. All the Indian and white population did know was, that death was taking a fast toll of their numbers. The form it took was that of acute dysentery,—but the Indian concoctions of weed or barks proved unavailing. There was no medicine man to pray and dance, and chase their ills away. Chief Black Feather had passed to his Happy Hunting Ground and his successor was too ill to attend to bring succour to his people. What faith they had, was in the strong-jawed man they called “Mater Bas.” The help that Underwood had given to the trapper, John, when crushed beneath the heavy log, had become a tradition in

the Indian community. From every direction the Indians came to him for a word of advice, or some new medicine,—such as Underwood had given at times when on hunting trips with them, at the trading posts or when hauling hay from their fields.

But the epidemic struck hard at the Underwood home as well. In their medicine cabinet was every ordinary household drug, and each was known to the parents, who had been given directions as to their use by their never failing relative who had sent them out tucked in the niches of each package that came.

First it was the children who fell ill. The intestinal troubles from which they had suffered on the trip from the prairies to Tum's Valley years before, had been mild in comparison to the form it took now. Though Underwood tried to recall remedies he had heard or read about, he could discover nothing more potent than his own supply of medicine. When Betty became affected he suddenly remembered when his mother had fed him cornstarch pudding until he had wished never to see it again. Immediately he took down the cornstarch from the pantry shelf, and, after boiling the powder in milk, he began feeding it to the family, not forgetting to take a good helping for himself.

It was not long before improvement in their conditions manifested itself in the children and in Betty Ray, now nearing seventeen, was the slowest to respond,—just as after the first attack years before.

As soon as Underwood was in condition to ride,—for he himself had suffered severely,—he took what could be spared of the cornstarch supply and rode to the Indian settlement. There he encounter-

ed tragedy on every side. Strong men stood with tears in their eyes, as their squaws rocked or clutched their children in their arms — some of them dead and cold — swaying and jabbering in their Indian tongue, while they looked up unto the face of their white friend with an expression of pleading and desperation.

Often before, the thought had come to Basil, how little the outside world knew of these men and women of the wilderness. How little they cared to know! And yet what pleasure and help he and his family had derived from their companionship! They had never stolen the white man's traps, his catch or his food. But the white boys thought nothing of making a trip to the woods and cleaning up everything in sight.

How he wished with all his soul that he might be of real assistance to these Indians, and that their trust in him might be justified. He knew he had their deepest confidence, and, as far as lay in his power, he was determined not to betray that trust!

In the first cabin he entered, a tall square-faced Indian was seated at the bunkside of a small child, his strong futs pressed solidly beneath his chin. The dark-skinned papoose was motionless. Bending over the little form, Underwood touched its cheek with his fingers. The face was cold and tiny beads of sweat stood out across its forehead. He raised the thin blanket and placed his hand over the child's heart as he knelt beside the bunk. The Indian father, save for a deep breathing that shook his body, was silent. Then Underwood spoke:

"Come on, old boy!" he said. "Your baby isn't dead! See?" And the child moved its lips,

slowly turning its small dark head from side to side, as though in pain.

"We'll fix him all right," continued Underwood, rising and calling to the father to rebuild the fire and bring some milk.

The baby-bottle was found and thoroughly washed. Then Underwood scalded some milk and mixed in with it some of the cornstarch he had brought. Once more he went down on his knees by the child's bed while he gently raised the sagging head in one hand and pressed the bottle nipple into its mouth.

At first it seemed as if the child would not respond. Then it squirmed and gave a few sharp cries. The warm milk ran into its throat, causing it to cough, and in doing so, it got a taste of the food and swallowed several times. This action had its double effect. Fading life was caught in the nick of time by the sudden jarring of its body, and the retaining of the food soon stimulated what life there was.

Two other children had died within the week, and the mother squaw was lying in the next room barely alive with the same dread disease. A thick pudding was prepared for this patient, and though she was strong enough to resist her feedings, her faithful man followed the instructions of his white friend and forced the pudding into his squaw's mouth.

From cabin to shack went Basil with his corn-starch—and vegetable panacea, which he gave strong, and hot, to those who could stand it—cooking it into pudding for some, while for others he mixed it with boiled milk. When milk was not available, he used boiled water that had cooled,

in order that the food might be taken in liquid form.

After he had visited nearly all the cabins, Underwood saw that his supplies were depleted. Only the occupants of one cabin had supplied their own starch, but everyone had been advised to get in a package if possible and there was soon no cornstarch at the trading post or small general store.

Then back through the settlement Underwood went, doing what he could for their comfort, and his visits continued throughout a week,—helping the living, and assisting in the burying of the dead . . . But it seemed that a miracle had happened, because many lives were saved, and an undying gratitude sprang up in the hearts of the tribe for the "White Doctor," as many liked to address him. There was nothing in their possession they would not give him. When his children passed their homes on stormy days on their way to school, or coming home, it was their delight to pick them up and carry them to their destination on horse-back. When the boys strayed on their trap-lines the Indians went miles out of their way to bring them in.

Baail's great idea was to help the Indians in any way he could, and he would barely allow them to thank him. He had looked beneath their dark skins into the bigness of their souls. He liked them.

CHAPTER

XV

Back in the prairies, time had not passed without its mungling fun and tragedy.

Through the years the ranchers and their helpers, towns people, good, bad, and indifferent—all had learned to know and like, old Tim. To Boss Miller, it had been something deeper that grew and held her regard for the toddling old man. Her treatment of him had been what she would have accorded an aging father who had become dependent upon her for the small kindnesses she could bestow.

The door of "Turkey Inn"—as Tim had decided to call the place—was bolted now, and would probably remain so, as Tim no longer needed a boss,—for she was going East to stay. With her would go many pleasant memories. Amongst them would be the laughs she had enjoyed and the many

little helpful things Tim had done to ease her burdens. Most of all, she would remember the day when her old friend had been carried to the hillside,—the same hill where he and young Raymond had sat on the second day of his coming to the Underwood's prairie home—a spot he had chosen himself,—and put to rest beneath a mound of desert earth.

She would remember how the homesteaders, range riders, Doukhobours, Chinamen, young and old, had come to pay their last respects. Some had brought bouquets of garden greenery, a house plant, or just a handful of wild cactus bloom. It had been a scene of unpressiveness that would last, even in the mind of rancher Tilson, the obstinate and much disliked "horn-honker" who had come to the hillside alone, and stood aloof hat in hand, while a prayer was said, and hymn sung by members of the small Gospel Assembly where Tim had been so loath to attend when first he'd arrived at Turkey Ranch.

Nurse Miller could not grieve at Tim's passing. He had realized his last illness was serious. All possible care and consideration had been given him in the comfortable quarters arranged for him at the Inn. He'd been patient all through his intense suffering, and had welcomed his release.

On the night that Basil heard the news he was sleeping in the open. He felt that a new star had come out and blinked down upon him and the surrounding miles of ripening timothy. All day the winds had swept the hay-fields, but they had subsided with the sunset, leaving not as much as the cry of a bird or a hoof-beat to mar the evening silence. Ten miles along the lake the hay-fields

stretched, and Basil had chosen to pitch his hay tent some five miles from the settlement. He lighted a match and touched the edge of the brush, then sat down beside his camp-fire. His face was strained, with little of the old laughter left in his eyes, and the expression on his face was inscrutable. Reaching for his blankets, he drew them across his chest and folded his arms beneath his head. As the light of the fire faded, accentuating the darkness, his mood seemed to partake of the thickening shadows. Perturbing thoughts came to him, demanding their answers.

"So, Tim is up there!" he said, aloud, softly, gazing into the stars. Visions of the old man came,—as first he'd seen him leaning on the gate exhausted from his long tramp, then as he waved good-bye, on the day the covered wagon rolled down the trail. But it was of his own children that Underwood thought, mostly. The old restless urge,—the reaching for things beyond his ken,—had all but burned itself out. Now it was the future of his children that filled his mind with conjecture.

"I'm getting old now," he thought, "as old as these hills, some days, and it might not matter so much what happens to me. It's for my children I'm worried. That they have youth, enough to eat and a bed at night, isn't enough . . ."

He thought of his boys. Ray would never be strong enough to live as his father had done, but there must be something, somewhere, for such a lad! And David!—so like his mother. He must have his chance. He was growing to be quite the man now,—long pants, and his tenor voice breaking a little when he joined in singing with his

family on Sunday evenings,—which was a happy and anticipated event. He had often expressed his desire to study mechanics.

A slow smile crossed Underwood's face as he pictured the pile of car junk David had brought home, bit by bit. How he had sweated and labored over it until he had constructed a contraption that would run, as well as a charger that worked to perfection. Yes, David must have his chance.

Rumors of unrest in Europe were slowly spreading across the vastness of the sea. Fragments had filtered through on the radio. Then had come the exciting news that Their Majesties were to visit Canada. They would cross Canada to the coast and would be not more than one hundred miles from the Indian settlement and the homes of the white settlers. Underwood hadn't forgotten the expression on his older daughter's face, as she had said to her mother, "Oh, Mum! couldn't we see the Queen?" Silence, at first, had followed her outburst,—the parents being reluctant to destroy too quickly a childish hope. Then Underwood had spoken. "You bet! I'll fix it some way," and Jean had rushed to her dad, thrown her arms about his neck and cried, kissed him, and cried again, until he had realized that to break that promise would be cruel, regardless of the cost of keeping it.

And here he lay under the stars, waiting for the sun to come up that his month of work could begin,—the month of work that meant not only winter supplies for his family and stock, but new shoes, a new dress, and the necessary cash, that Jean might have a passing glance of her Queen.

Days passed. Underwood and his team worked unceasingly, though there were days when the

lifting and pitching were almost more than his back could bear. There was much to be done, too, back on his own place, but the boys worked hard to help their mother in her many duties, and they looked after the stock,—the fifty sheep, with their lambs, being Ray's special care. These duties, however, did not prevent the boys from coming to the fields alternately, to assist their father in his work. These sons of Underwood were deep thinkers. They, too, wished for better things and were willing and ready to do their part in attaining them, and now this included the happiness of their sister.

Many times during the laborious hay gathering and hauling, the Indians had come down to lend a hand. One of these was a girl of fifteen, who enjoyed driving the team. Day after day, she drove and sang all the cow-boy songs Underwood had taught the tribe, her rich, true voice ringing out over the stretch of water and echoing from the hills.

Underwood had casually mentioned the fact that he might accept a job that would take him into the forests for two months or so in the winter. Immediately the Indian girl had become enthusiastic and keenly desirous of going with him to cook his meals. Thinking little of the girl's suggestion, Underwood showed his amusement by asking, "How much would you want for salary?" To which the girl replied, "Oh, I work for my food! I no take money!" Basil had smiled and told the girl he thought he could manage by "batchung" it, and the conversation had shifted to mention of her Mission school, her guitar, which she played very well, and his thanks for the work she had done.

But the Indian gratitude does not end so easily.

It had been to this girl's home that Underwood had hastened with his cornstarch remedy not so long before. To go into the forest, or away on a ranch for a few months, just to cook this white man's food, seemed a very little thing to do by way of compensation for the lives he had helped to save.

Later that evening when entering the pasture to see that his horses were hobbled and bedded for the night, Underwood heard sobbing. Leaning against a tree was the Indian girl, crying her heart out.

"What's wrong?" Basil asked.

The girl hesitated to speak of her grief at first, but when pressed by him, she explained, "My mother say, I no go cook for you!"

Giving an answer that would avoid a renewed outbreak of tears, Basil said, laughingly, "Never mind!—don't feel badly about it. My wife wouldn't like it, either!"

* * * *

Once the plan of their daughter's trip was settled, and the services of three honorable and friendly Indian guides secured, the Underwoods felt easier in their minds. The trip would be a weary and dangerous one, but Jean, like her mother, was an expert horse woman, though young in the saddle. Like her father, she was cool and introspective. Life had been lived in the wilds with few advantages, yet that life was well ordered, and leaving her home in the company of Madge and three redskins, to cover a round trip of two hundred miles over many unbroken trails, was a direct

departure from the Underwoods' mode of living.

There was great surprise and excitement when two packages had arrived at the settlement post office. One was from a Winnipeg department store and the other was from the East. Fastening both parcels to her saddle, Jean had sped home to explore their contents. Many things were inside,—family necessities and a few luxuries such as chocolate, raisins, marmalade, toothpaste and soap,—but the greatest of all luxuries was a new dress and a pair of tan shoes.

"He did it! Pop did it!" cried the excited and happy Jean. "Isn't it grand?" And the dress was held high that all might see its flowered pattern, its round-cut neck, with soft, white, frilly collar and cuffs that were elbow length.

Diving into the package the second time, another dress was discovered. Jean was tall and thin. This dress was for a shorter person, and much broader.

Betty had stood a little apart from the table where the packages were being inspected, watching the expressions on her daughter's face and on Madge's. Madge, who had watched with mingled pleasure and envy, the unpacking of the first dress, had not the slightest suspicion that the second dress was for her. But Betty enlightened her.

"See if it fits, Madge," she said. "You are going with Jean on the trip, you know, and it wouldn't be fair if you didn't have a new dress, too,—would it?"

Hastily the second dress was held high against Madge, to determine its length, and then measured across her full firm bust and plump shoulders.



"Fit like anything!" exclaimed Jean, still dancing about, clapping her hands in glee, apparently as pleased with Madge's dress as with her own.

Great was the joy of the girls, too, when the second box was opened, for in it were the accessories,—a warm wooly sweater and beret, matching in colour with Jean's dress, as well as the blue of her eyes and the unusual yellow-gold of her hair. An attached note read,—"To Jean, to wear when you go to see the Queen,—your Pirate Aunt."

Then the thought struck the mother forcibly that neither Jean nor Madge could ride for such a long distance in their new dresses. Somewhere, somehow, they must change their riding breeches for these new fineries, before the silver-blue palace on wheels passed through that desert station yard.

It had never occurred to the unsophisticated mind of Betty's daughter that a fleeting glimpse of the passing train in the dusk, might be the only memory she would bring back. Yet the parents had made a promise that would be kept.

The party set out bright and early, when the eastern sun was showing its first faint glow of sunrise, so they could reach their destination before the sun had set, giving them an opportunity to catch the first glimpse of the Royal train, as it wound in through the low hills. They planned to follow it on their horses until it passed from sight. This had been their idea, with the secret hope that Their Majesties might hear their calls and Indian war whoops and turn their royal eyes up their direction.

The day's fading light lay soft upon the mountainside behind them, while off in the direction of the station were still many miles of corduroy trail,

with here and there a single light, which told of a rancher's home, but no light came near to show the way.

It was long past the travellers' supper hour, and to have a meal meant a fifteen minute stop, while the pintos got their wind. To make the railway station by midnight would call for fast yet careful riding.

A few minutes stop while the girls gulped down the last of their sandwiches and the ponies rested was all that could be managed, and again the trail was hot.

Now night had fallen and there was still a considerable distance to cover. The trails were difficult and at times confusing, even to the seasoned guides, who often found it necessary to dismount and search for tracks and turns. Discouragement was evident in the tones of their voices. The girls were tired to the point of tears, though glad that in the darkness their disappointment could not be

Making a sharp turn, the leading guide called out. "Hayo! . . . See light of train off there!" He pulled his horse to a halt and pointed in a different direction from that in which they were travelling. Yes, there was the slowly moving head-light, not more than a mile away!—shifting its beam from hill to hill and out across the darkness of the plains.

"Can we make it?" was the thought in each individual mind, as the leading guide quickly recognized the dark outline of a watering place, and a swinging lantern that signalled the stop.

On the party rushed! three minutes,—four,—five,—other dark forms darted by them on the trail,

—all excited, all bent on the one great adventure,—that of catching one small glimpse of their Sovereigns, as the train slowed down for water.

Finally the spot was reached. From every direction had come the ranchmen, the cattlemen, the cow-boys and the Indians,—rich and poor, young and old! Those on horse-back raced beside the lighted windows of the train, giving their war-whoops and calls.

The last car was well down the track. At this point a few horsemen pressed close to the observation car rail, still calling, still whooping, while a few struck up a cow-boy song in harmony.

Calling to Madge to follow, and forcing her horse through the gathering of stamping ponies, Jean faced the lighted doorway of the car.

"Come on, Madge!" Jean called again. "Force your horse in here, beside me!" And as quickly as she spoke, the nose of Madges' horse came close beside the rail.

Suddenly, the door opened. There in the full light from the Royal apartments, stood the graceful and beautiful Queen. Beside her, looking over her shoulder, was the tall and stately form of the King.

Slowly her Majesty walked to the rail of the car, smiled, and raised her gracious hand. Shouts went up and over the land like rockets.

Then the King, whose eyes had slowly covered the crowd in their festive headgears, with their smiling and happy faces, raised his hand above that of his Queen, and waving it in a friendly manner, smiled down upon his humble though loyal subjects of the forest and the hills.

The train was moving slowly away. With gleaming eyes, Jean stood tall and slim in her

riding breeches, yellow-gold hair tucked neatly beneath her wooly cap,—quite forgetful of then ewly acquired dress that lay folded in its box beside her saddle,—and barely daring to breathe for fear the vision would pass too quickly. She raised her hand, and, touching her lips with her fingertips, threw her Queen a kiss! It seemed to Jean that the smiling eyes of the Queen looked straight into hers, as Her Majesty touched her lips and returned her token of affectionate respect.

CHAPTER

XVI

"Look at this!" exclaimed Underwood, passing a week-old paper to his wife, busily engaged in darning the knots of Donald's stockings. The soft light of the lamp cast a glow upon her face that now seemed to retain a little less of its former girlish youthfulness.

"It means trouble this time all right!" he continued in a tone that held a touch of panic.

There were glaring headlines and editorials. Trouble, national and political, was brewing. Although Basil was not at heart a pacifist, he had laboured hard and suffered much to reach a fair degree of contentment, and he felt reluctant to have his land and home he had built up under difficult conditions, jeopardized by a crisis, such as the one that now seemed to confront the west, with its potential affect on the whole of Canada.

At the coast there was to be a general round-up of the Japanese owners of fishing craft, canneries, and many other industries. The vast out-put of acres of tomatoes, celery, sugar beets and various other products, seemingly so easily produced by these prolific yellow-skins, was to be halted while a check-up was made of their loyalty.

According to the newspaper, these despised and unwanted people might be moved into the interior. Underwood, philosophic though he was, could not smother the protesting rebel in his being which cried out for justice. Had not white man and Indian alike slaved from dawn till dark for years to clear their virgin land? Yet here was a proposed governmental move to place coastal Japs far inland,—not so many miles as the crow would fly, from Bassi and the other settlers, to compete with them.

It was not merely the psychological effect this movement might have upon the minds of the women and children, it was the resentment that Underwood knew many settlers would feel on the score that all these treacherous emigrants had not been placed behind barbed wire of concentration camps.

Time passed. Some of Underwood's worst fears in regard to the coming of the yellow-skins seemed justified. Though miles from their fishing boats and other activities, many of these people were foot-loose to cultivate vast stretches of land. They were given camps that surpassed the cabins and humble homes of the hard working men of the forest in their conveniences, locations and comforts. Under such conditions, their crops gave promise of more abundance than those of the white men, and tended to be superior in quality, due to their

possession of more modern equipment, and help.

Thus they were in a position to secure better markets than the other settlers could with smaller production.

Through the years Underwood had had little time, desire, or opportunity, for discussion of politics. "Let these men in their padded office chairs handle affairs," had been his usual comment when he was asked for an opinion on a political matter. But now he could not help questioning the government's way of doing things.

Why, he asked himself, all this eternal struggle for power? Would this old world of men never learn the true meaning of Christianity,—the love of fellow man? These and many similar thoughts oppressed Basil.

Until the advent of World War II, Underwood had felt that his restlessness was a thing of the past. Even after the declaration of war, he had felt that he could render valuable service to his country by an extra effort to produce more on his farm,—as he was too old to be accepted even had he been in better health. Then, too, Ray was at the age for enlistment. He was not A-1 physically, but he would not be discouraged if he wished to follow other young men in and about the settlements in their ambitions to see service and the world.

There was David, also. If the war lasted two years, then he too, would probably leave home, eager to learn how things clicked, ticked, and sparked,—out in the great world. Taking things apart, putting them together, building, creating, this was his joy.

Betty was beginning to realize again, the state of her husband's mind. She had tried to believe it

would pass and did her utmost to conceal her own anxiety. It would be such a task now,—this moving with such a large family, though the many hands made work lighter in other ways.

Finally she said, "We could build out at our little lake, couldn't we? All the Japs and Germans in creation couldn't find us out there!—not for a long time, anyway!"

"Well, that's one way, I suppose," answered Underwood, "but this is the time we must think of the older children. They must have their schooling, somewhere. It wouldn't be right to hide them from all advantages as one of the trappers did with his children in the last war,—until they were unable and afraid to face the world when the time came that they were forced to do so. No! we can't do that. Neither can we compete with these cursed yellow-bellies! . . . I shall have to look around for a better place to go."

* * * * *

"If a man was willing to work," it was said, "there was usually room for him at Goodchild's, a cattle ranch, now valued at half a million dollars. The owners possessed, too, an entire town near Monte Creek, and a lake property with pasture lands of six hundred miles in circumference.

Having heard of the scarcity of men on this ranch, Underwood applied for a post and was accepted.

There again, was the ordeal of getting his family and belongings moved up from his own place to be faced, but difficulties were surmounted somehow. They were not, in any event, as serious as

those they had faced years ago when the Underwoods had moved from the prairie. During the intervening years, there had been an influx of settlers in the west, and so sleeping accommodations and food enroute were easier to secure. In addition to this advantage, Underwood received value for his property and a few luxuries were possible.

When the family arrived at their new settlement, it was discovered that, among the many shacks and houses available to employees, there was one more particularly suited to their needs on a part of the property near the section Underwood would be working on.

Up to the declaration of war, it had been customary to work a crew of Indians in the alfalfa fields, — irrigating, keeping miles of ditches cleared and repaired. Conditions were vastly different now and help was at a premium. Only two Indians were on the job where twelve or fifteen had worked before, and these two were over age for war service.

Seizing the opportunity to be of assistance to his father in the maintenance of the home, Ray accepted the job of packing supplies for the sheepmen, and salt for the sheep. The trails were difficult and steep, leading along twelve miles of precipitous mountain-side to the sheep camps.

Using four pack-horses was a new experience for Ray, but the horses were well trained, with the sure-footedness of the mountain pony. And pay was good. There was much the boy wished to do for his family, and thus seemed his first real opportunity. Donald could take over small chores now, — with little Mary climbing on a salt box to wipe dishes.

Much of David's time from school was spent

in the alfalfa fields with his dad, though his room in the house intrigued him, and he enjoyed long evenings up there. Now he had electricity to experiment with, and his tool-kit was set out with many added contraptions and gadgets, bought with his first pay. From the ceiling of his room hung several airplane models, dangling on long cords, some made out of pasteboard, some of intricately carved cigar box covers, but all showing an unborn ingenuity. There was no doubt as to David's air-mindedness.

The family had many a hearty laugh at the way David had gathered together bits of three old carts on his way to and from school, which, with part of a discarded trailer body with its patched and lifeless tires, he'd transformed into a movable contraption which his dad had christened 'Fetchum'. The thing would run very well down hill. It had no lights, horn or license, but the distance of two miles to school was mostly down grade, and Fetchum had proved more than a fair weather friend. It was a different matter getting home, however. Good-natured ranchers, for miles around, took turns at hitching Fetchum to their haycarts, tractors or ploughs, and conveying the lad, who sat smiling at the wheel, to his home.

"Our Little Woman Vet," was the name given Jean by the ranchers, who found her capable in breaking in the wildest mustang as in assisting with the delivery of a foal. Horses were Jean's chief interest. Between these animals and herself, there seemed to be a perfect understanding. She was always eager to be up at an earlier hour than necessary, that she might feed, brush and curry her own special horse until his coat shone like satin.

Only once had she been thrown deliberately. On that occasion she had broken 'only one toe', as she boasted to her parents, after receiving treatment from the town doctor.

In the fields Indian girls were added to the crew, taking the places of men in baling the alfalfa. Underwood supervised the hauling away from the machine and the loading in the freight cars where the 200 lb. bags were packed tightly against the roof. This was a heavy job which often required his assistance with the lifting.

There came a call for extra help in marking the fields for irrigation in the second year at Goodchild's. When no response was made Jean decided to use the family team and try her luck at helping out, only to win the special praise of the owners, as her work was done as efficiently as any trained man could have done it. With the money she earned, Jean bought her first fine riding boots, at twenty-two dollars. Beauties they were, and the pride of her days.

Gone were the days of the axe and grub-hoe!—or so it seemed these first two years at Goodchild's. Many times, when alone in their sitting-room at night, the Underwoods talked of the Paradise Valley days and the friends they had made and left in the settlement near the lake. From out the jumble of it all, there emerged the memory of many happy hours, —the beauty of the place,—the gardens where wild flowers and a few cultivated ones, bloomed between the rows of vegetables,—the little rustic bridge where they had taken their first stroll the night they arrived at Tim's dejected cabin, --and freedom.

To be sure, at Goodchild's there was free rent

and fuel,—two cows and chickens to supply their eggs and poultry. They had a garden shaded by apple trees, and two bee hives to provide their syrup for wheat cakes. There was opportunity to raise their own pork and keep their sheep for wool. But it didn't take long for ugly grasshoppers to destroy the best of gardens. And hens do stop laying.

There were two undeniable advantages, however. One was the decided improvement in Underwood's health, and this in itself, was well worth the trials the family had encountered. The other was the fact that Betty's mother was only one short day's ride away.

The winters here were trying, too. There were two hundred and fifty head of cattle to feed, which required the full seven day week of work, giving no time for rest or change. Feeling the strain of this, Underwood arranged for a trip up the mountain when Ray next came down for supplies, four weeks being the usual time intervening. Ray had taken this job to learn more of sheep raising.

The sheepmen were good men of their kind. They could curse and fight as well as any, but, all in all, they were big-hearted and honest, loving fun, and the freedom of the hills. Most of them were considerably older than Ray, and there were times when loneliness got the youth down. Realizing this, Underwood decided to take the trip back with his son.

First, the supplies were carried thirty-five miles by truck to the end of the one narrow road and passed over to Ray. From there, they were portaged across a lake to a spot where the horses were tied, waiting. Packing the horses with two hundred

pounds each, they were led on to the trail, which wound up the mountainside, pungent with its odors of muskeg, sagebrush, pine and cedar. At times, the taller trees hid the sun as they journeyed. When finally the benchland was reached, the mountain ranges for hundreds of miles in every direction made an unforgettable picture.

By the campfire at night, stories of sheep-ripping and bear trapping were exchanged. A thousand head were on that mountainside, and in the preceding year alone, twenty-five bears had been shot on one trail and feeding ground.

In addition to packing supplies, it was Ray's work to shift camp, by pack horse, to new feeding grounds and occasionally to cook for the herders.

"War seemed a long way off up there," Underwood said when relating to his wife his experiences at the camp.

The labour question at Goodchild's was becoming serious. Men were leaving for easier and higher paid jobs in the cities. There was rumour that many ranchers were thinking of selling out, including Goodchild, as the head owner was getting on in years and the worry and care was too great for him.

The Underwoods had not been successful, as success is counted by most men, but there had been an upward trend in their affairs, in the direction of more comforts of life, and they had a small bank account to show for the sweat of their collective brows!

It was now necessary for Basil and his family to move across the Thompson River, one mile from their present location, that he might carry on a certain part of the still operating ranch, and

attend to the transportation across the river. The pay was not so good, but they would be able to get by until something better came their way.

It was safer across the river,—safer to work in the fields,—safer for the children to play out of doors, and all because every bush, every bunch of grass or rock near their present home, housed a hissing rattler. Along the garden paths and hiding among vegetables, were their slimy, horny coils, waiting for a chance to spring. In the barns they had attacked the cows several times until their capacity to produce milk had become impaired. Even in the porch of their home when a loose board would move, the pointed heads, with their quivering fangs, would slide through, and but for the quick action of throwing a block of wood, a stone, and a few times a flatiron, many a severe bite might have been inflicted.

Their hearts were considerably lightened by the thoughts of the anticipated change of location, for the advantages would be many.

CHAPTER

XVII

For a couple who had striven against such heavy odds for the bare necessities of life and in the bringing up of a family, it seemed due time that some ray of light should brighten their horizon. Yet the Underwoods were but one of the millions of families that had to work and suffer and give of their hearts' blood if peace was to come to the world. Therefore, they were not overly surprised when David announced he was signing up for service,—their David, who seemed such a child when his protected and simple life to date was set against what the future might hold for him. But he had reached the required age, and his desire to continue in a field that had heretofore been his hobby, was overcome by his more urgent desire to serve his country.

It was a sad day,—that day of parting,—the first break in a loving family,—sadder than in

some homes perhaps, because of the unusual closeness of the ties that united the family, due to their lack of outside interests.

After David had left, all went smoothly in the little house by the river that day—after the first tears—until evening. The children, Donald, Mary and little Sue,—were tucked in bed and sleeping soundly. Jean was putting the last touches to her school frock for the morrow. Seated by the table, presumably busy with her mending, was the little mother whose sunny face was seldom without its smile. Now it suddenly became drawn, and her lips trembled. Raising her eyes, she looked about the room. Then she thought, "Wonder where Basil is! I didn't hear him go out." Then she glanced through the doorway to his accustomed rocker near the kitchen stove where he so often sat with eyes closed, humming some old song. But he was not there. Listening intently she thought she heard a sound upstairs.

Mounting the stairs quietly for fear her husband might be sleeping, as he had often done in the early evening of late, Betty went on tip-toe to their room. The room was empty. Across the hall a light shone from another room,—David's!

For a few moments the impulse was to return downstairs. Then the thought came, "No, I should be with him! . Poor dear!—if only I knew what to say!" And biting her lips, she tapped lightly and waited.

"Come in," came the low, hesitant voice.

Standing by a long shelf, which previously had held all sorts of gadgets, tools and scraps, Underwood was holding a set of small screwdrivers in his hand. As his wife entered, he slowly lifted the

cover of a box David had used for his choicest tools, and placed the set carefully inside, closing the box and allowing his long fingers to smooth across its top in a few caressing strokes.

Slipping her arm through that of her husband's Betty stood in silence. Words would not come.

Turning and placing a finger under her trembling chin, Underwood said, "Cheer up, little mother! He'll soon be back."

David's training took him far afield. At the end of his firm six months there was the usual home leave for a few days. Then came Toronto for a time where the city lights and crowds amused and thrilled his unsophisticated soul, yet never blotted out for an hour the faces of his loved ones, or the joys he had experienced in his prairie and forest homes. On to the East he went,—that trip to East Coast where his father had been born and had lived as a little boy,—where his mother and father had visited when first married and mother had been afraid of the roar of the sea. How he recalled all the stories he had been told of the early wooden ship days! And there he was, looking out over that same blue stretch of water that his ancestors had crossed in their own little ships. Here was the remaining land where his great-grandfather had built his ship,—the spring tides having crumbled much of it away. Its remaining frontage was lined with fish-racks, upon which were drying many tons of cured fish. Here was the same shore where his dad had played and learned to swim, and sail a boat.

From this coastal station David wrote home: "At last I have met my Pirate aunt! Boys! Is she nice to me! I had my forty-eight hours off with

her and we had a dandy time. It rained, but we stayed in as we had lots to talk about. Every time I look at her, I wish, Mum that you had spanked me harder.

"I haven't words to describe all I have seen, and the kind of things done for me. Some day, Mum, you and Pop must come East again. I think you might like it better if you did.

"I have no idea how long I shall be stationed here, or where my next move will be, but you can depend on one thing, what ever happens, my thoughts are with you at home.

"My training and work take me aloft very often and I like it. It is thrilling. Just like driving old friend, 'Fetchum.' Tell Pop to keep the old crate greased and say I miss them both. They don't come any better than my Pop, but I guess you know that, Mum. A fella can't go far wrong when he has parents like mine."

"Do hope you have found a better place to live by Christmas and where the altitude is higher for Pop's sake."

"Your last box arrived all right and thanks a lot. I shared the doughnuts with some fellas who haven't anyone much to send them goodies.

"Wish Ray would write oftener as his letters seem a long time getting to me. I don't mind Don using my tools as long as he does not break my pet planes. I could build a real plane now and I call my Beaufighter, 'Fetchum,' too because she always gets me there and back safely."

"Give Jean, Mary and the little tinker, some big kisses for me, and lots for you, Mum and Dad.

"So long for now. All my love,
David."

Christmas came to find its cheery wreaths of cedar and pine tied with bright red bows, hung in the windows of the same little house by the river. Though the family circle was depleted by the absence of David, it was made cheerful by the presence of Betty's mother, Mrs. Kinnear, who was delighted to be with her daughter and family, at a season usually depressing for one who lives alone.

Up in the mountains, Ray was packed and ready two days before Christmas,—happy in the anticipation of being away from the loneliness and chill of camp, to enjoy his mother's pumpkin pie and mincemeat, and to open packages that always came from the East and the prairies.

This fondest of brothers, who was not shirking his duty to his country, but still hoping to be accepted for some war service, realized well the emptiness of the home with David away. It was with bitter disappointment, he watched the increasing violence of a blizzard, knowing it meant the disruption of his plans.

"If only I had friend Fetchim, I could make it!" he said to the herder who worked with him and shared the camp loneliness. "I shouldn't complain, though. This is just *"my"* bit of things,—and Mum's doughnuts keep!"

* * * * *

"Why not take over the small ranch near my place, Basil?" asked Mrs. Kinnear, one day of her visit, explaining that the ranchers who had rented it for several years were moving North.

The location held many fond memories for the aged woman. She loved every stick and stone of

those hills and bench-lands. Spring had always been a blessed time, — leaving her small apartment, where she had spent her winters since left alone, to climb again her cherished trails to her cabin home. The thought of having Betty near again and the children, whom she loved dearly, was new life to her.

There had been two moves in this Christmas visit. Seeing the family again meant much. But the vacant property on the bench-lands had been a worry. She would miss the signs of life, — the lights at night and the neighbouring rancher's children running in, with a basket of wild berries, or a trout for supper.

Underwood had recently learned of the vacant ranch, and its location held dear memories, too, for him. He had thought of suggesting a try at running it, but it did seem a physical effort beyond his strength, now that help was not procurable. He had visioned the ranch-house as he had last seen it, sheltered by a heavy line of trees, a long, low, comfortable looking place, with room to spare. He knew there were conveniences, and that had been his deepest concern.

"Do you really mean it, mother?" asked Betty, excitedly. "We have to get away from here, anyway, and we haven't known which way to turn for a place, though Basil has ridden for hundreds of miles, it seems, looking for something we could buy or rent."

Never before had Betty taken the initiative insofar as expressing strongly her desires. Changes for her had been often and varied enough when catering to the wanderlust in her husband. There had been no necessity for her to ask for a change.

She had had them, anyway, without any spoken desire from her.

It pleased Underwood to see the light in his wife's eyes, as they had appeared weary and lacking in their usual brightness, for months.

There had been a suspicion of tears in her voice when she asked, "Do you really mean it, mother?"

"Why wouldn't she be glad to go back to a place near her own home?" Underwood asked himself, "if by so doing she finds a little happiness? It is only what she deserves. Goodness knows she has earned it after putting up with me and my whimsies all these years."

"Well, mother," spoke Underwood, slowly, tapping his fingers on the table as he talked. "I have thought of trying out the place, but I know conditions about here, and help is mighty scarce there, isn't it?"

"What about using a few Indians?" enquired Mrs. Kinnear. "There's still a good living there," and she described the cattle that could be bought at a little more than a few dollars a head, and the four horses and farm equipment. Then she said, "I would like to spend the rest of my summers up there, and I think I could, if you and Betty were nearer"—and the trembling voice died in a half sob.

"You bet we'll come!" was the joint reply, as Betty bent over her mother's chair and kissed the wrinkled cheek.

"Guess perhaps it's worth taking over just to have you near us," was Underwood's honest reply.

* * * * *

It was spring again. Another move had been accomplished. Surely this must be the last!, Betty thought.

From the Indian reservation across from Kathloope, Underwood had rustled a crew of Indians to work the ranch. Ray had come down from the mountain and climbed another,—to his own sheep-camp this time, where two hundred blustering balls of fluff struggled in their sheepwalk.

In the town, a short ride down,—on Saturday nights especially, there was always a busy throng of men in uniform, Indians, cow-boys, ranchers and cattlemen, all swarming the small, squatly stores and ice-cream booths, intent on their bit of weekend revelry.

Along the river banks were hundreds of acres of tomatoes, fruit orchards and alfalfa fields, adding colour to the scene from the hills above the town.

The winter would bring its biting wind and snow, but there was comfort in the long, low, log cabin home, comfort not enjoyed before by the children. An open fire burned and sputtered its warmth and cheerfulness, spreading through the finished and spacious rooms.

"How David would glory in this!" thought his father, the first evening when all was put to rights, each room being made personal by its pictures, rugs and Paradise Valley blankets and quilts.

It had been something of a shock to the family to learn of David's arrival in England. He had made the trip across in the 'Queen Elizabeth'. They had hoped for one more glimpse of their 'Little Boy Blue', as his mother had called him when she viewed the picture of her son in uniform. The news of his arrival in England had stunned the Underwoods for a day or two. It didn't seem possible that their own offspring was now a part of the world's great conflict.

"Suppose he shouldn't come back?" had been Betty's first words when the message was read. Then, "Oh, Basul, if anything happens to him!"

Disturbing thoughts like these filled the parents' minds, but Basul had talked, reasoned and tried to prepare his children, as well as their mother, for just such a crisis as this.

"All we can do is hope, my dear!" he said, but he found it difficult to keep anxiety out of his voice. "We mustn't cross our bridges too soon. It's the wrong time to worry, you know."

Kissing his wife, Underwood left the house and mounted the sweating horse that had brought him up from the post office.

Turning from the window where she had watched her husband until he disappeared, Betty crossed the room and stood before a photograph. She saw blond, towed hair as though the wind were lifting it, deep set eyes of blue, eyes like Jim Kinnear's, blue as the sea,—a long, friendly face that smiled around the up-turned mouth.

She lifted the picture and pressed it against her heart. In a soft whisper, she prayed "Take care of my boy, dear God!"

Letters came regularly for eight months,—letters packed with interest. David described his experiences when on leave in Scotland with his pal Nipper, who also kept the mechanism of a gigantic fighter intact, the sail down the lochs, and the hills of heather—some samples of which he tucked in his letters.

Like so many Canadian boys, David found the Scottish hospitality a thing to remember. Homes, from the most humble, to the palatial, were thrown open to the servicemen and women. Nothing was

too good for the boys and girls from Canada. He described London's fine service clubs, Buckingham Palace and St. Paul's Cathedral, adding that of course he had seen much of the destruction caused by bombing.

"I often long for an hour or a night full of Paradise Valley quiet," he wrote once, "but don't you worry, folks, I'm fine!"

Shortly after that, a letter came from Ireland. "Thanks for the warm socks, mum," David wrote. "They followed me around some, but I have them on right now, though it's long after midnight. No chubblaws for me, dear mum."

"Grandad's package came, too, with its doughnuts which he says he made himself, and I think I believe him as they taste exactly as they always have."

"I'm staying in a small thatched-roof cottage with a real motherly old lady who likes to talk of Canada. There are six of us here and all are asleep except me. I can't sleep tonight, somehow, and just came upstairs from the open fire where I was served a cup of hot milk and a cookie. Made me think of when I was a little shaver."

"From the window where I am standing, I can see the stars, and the little sparks from the cottage chimney seem to mix up with them, as the wind is quite high tonight."

"I'm making a special hop tomorrow,—special, because we guys get tough when we lose a pal. Nipper 'got his' and I saw him come down. He was a fine fellah. Perhaps I'm missing him 'cause we had plans back home. Strange, Pop, but Nipper's dad had taught him like you taught us, men shouldn't kill one another. That's why we chose this kind of job. We smash hell out of some things,

but we kill fewer people. You will like that, Pop, though I've changed my ideas some, from the things I've seen . . .

"There was one direct hit I saw in London. There were about fifty people in a cement garage that had a good, deep cellar. They were mostly old people, children, and mothers with babies. I shall never forget the look on one mother's face as I took the dead baby out of her arms. One little girl, about Mary's age, was almost ripped open, but she was conscious when Nipper and I lifted her from the rubble. She looked up at Nipper and asked, 'Am I going to get better?' Nipper said 'You bet you are, if you want to!'

"We were on leave, and like all the boys when things happen, we rushed in to help."

David's letters brought the war very close to his parents, who treasured every scrap of paper from him, reading and rereading them, and then packing them away in a special box. Often his letters were brought out of the box to read again when a week or two slipped by and no word came from him.

* * * * *

There was a bad moment when the message came.

An Indian helper had been in town for the evening and had brought it up the trail to the cabin, singing as he rode, not dreaming of its tragic contents.

Betty, her face white in the lamp-softened shadows, was ghost-like as she took the envelope and opened it,—her mother-heart beating out in hammer strokes, as she said, "It's David!"

Gripping the arms of his chair, Underwood did not rise, but dropped his head in silent acceptance.

Jean was at school in the town, leaving the cabin a quiet place when the children were asleep. There were no sounds but the tick of the clock, the snap of the wood fire in the kitchen and the snoring of the dog, Rusty, the pup with the crooked paw, that David had brought home and nursed.

Then, out of the night, came the coyote calling to its mate mingled with distant rumble of thunder.

The life of David flashed kaleidoscopically into the mind of his father, little things he had done and said, from the time he had cut his first tooth, to the joyful day when he had found his first whistler. His laugh came to him,—the flash of his nimble wit,—his tool-kit.

As the howl of the wolf cut through the stillness, a picture came suddenly to the father's mind of the last coyote David had caught. Tracks of the animal had been seen about the chicken houses. David had brought out his trap and set it at the entrance of the forest along the line of tracks. In the early morning, before the family had wakened, the hurt whine of an animal had rent the air. Standing in the yard close to the cabin, was the young coyote, holding one front paw off the ground, his head thrown back in utter grief as he cried,—the trap-jaws still gripping the bleeding foot.

"Look, Pop!" David had cried. "He has come for me to take it off."

"But he'll tear your eyes out," Underwood had answered.

"He won't bite me," David had said. "I can fix it!" And he had!

Hugh on the mountainside, Ray, the shepherd,

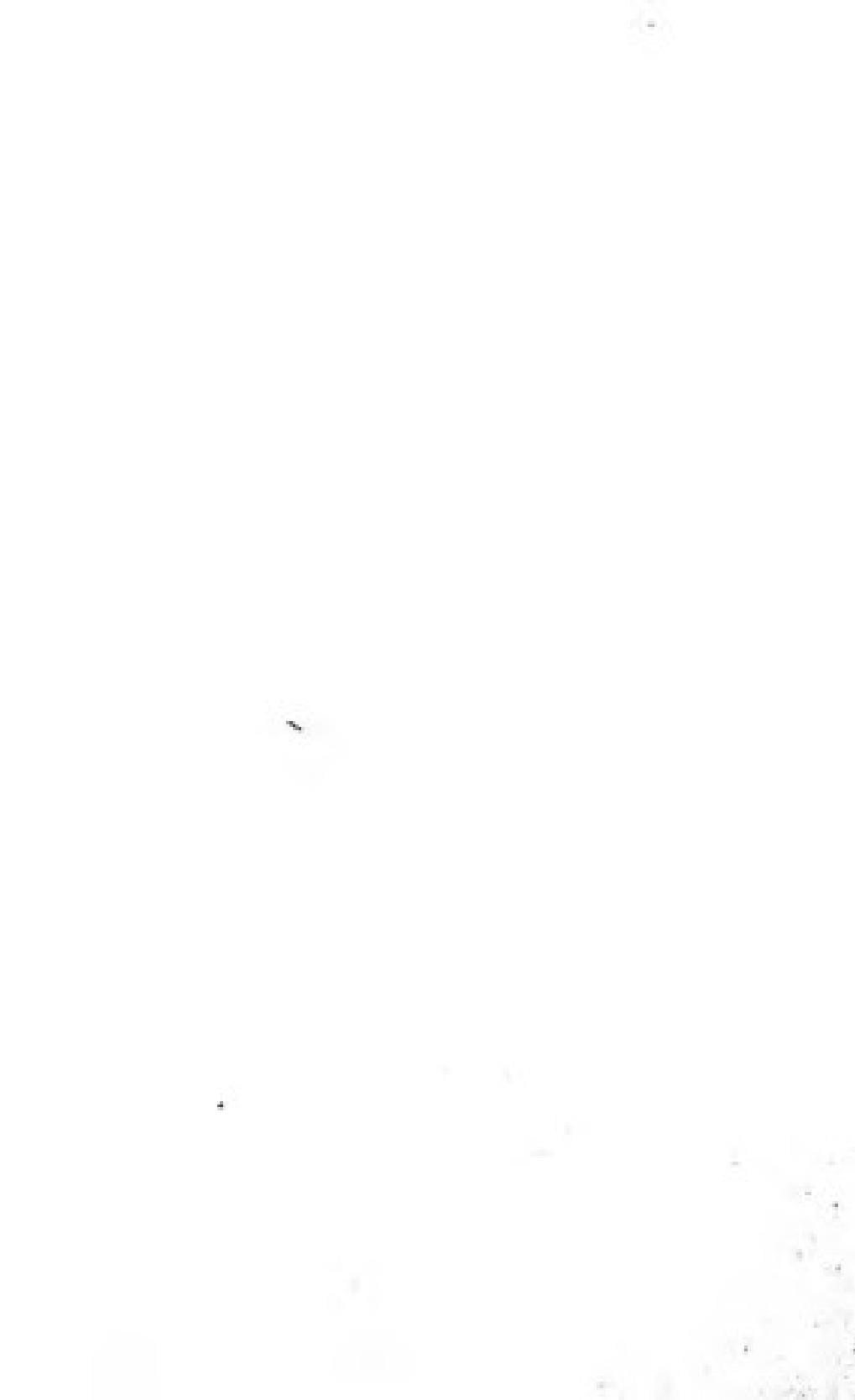
was taking his turn in tending the sheep. It was the same evening, and the sky was ugly and black with spitting rain, though the moon rode high behind drifting clouds. There was a deep rumble of thunder. With his crook and gun, Ray walked to the edge of a cliff where he could command a view of the sheep as they grazed or slept. Here he stood, looking out over the vastness of the mountain peaks and forests, and down over the trails to home. "A real home this time," he thought, "and about time Mum and Pop had it!" He was glad that he had been given an opportunity to assist in giving a few comforts to the parents he loved.

A crash of thunder sounded. Lightening flashed and forked its fiery prongs in every direction. The sky became a constant glare of dazzling light criss-crossed and forked by its piercing charges of electricity.

There was sadness in the shepherd's eyes. Then his face changed. He smiled, as he said aloud, "I wonder,—could it be David—hatching his Beau-fighter—to a star?"







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